



REBIRTH OF THE THIEF WHO ROAMED THE WORLD

BOOK 01

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Rebirth of the Thief Who Roamed The World

(重生之贼行天下)

by

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Synopsis

The world's largest VRMMO, Conviction, was almost like a second world for humanity. It had integrated itself into the real world's economy, with both corporations and individuals seeking their fortunes through the game.

In this game, Nie Yan prided himself in his Level 180 Thief. He could barely be considered among the top experts in the game. Though, that was the only thing he could take pride in. He was penniless and unable to advance in life; a situation he was forced into by the enemy of his father. If it weren't for the little money he made by selling off items in Conviction, he would've barely been able to eat. In the end, he chose to settle his matters once and for all. He assassinated his father's enemy. He lay dying shortly after being shot in the pursuit.

However, that wasn't the end of his story. Instead, he awoke moments later to find that he had reincarnated into his past-self. Armed with his experience and knowledge of future events, he sets out to live his life anew.

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Chapter 1 – Rebirth

「Born into suffering. Suffering leads to death.

Parting with one's desire leads to bitterness.

Bitterness leads into what one does not desire,

Being unable to obtain one's desires leads into Suffering.」

In Buddhism, there are the [Eight Sufferings](#); Nie Yan had experienced no fewer than five of these sufferings. His whole life since birth had basically been a chronicle of tragedies. Fortunately, it was a short chronicle, because he only lived to the age of twenty-eight before facing his mortality.

Perhaps his life ought to have ended at that point. However, at that moment, fate conceived a single turning point.

Nie Yan turned over. A feeling of wetness arose from his back as his clothing clung closely to his skin. It was an uncomfortable sensation. He vaguely recalled having been shot in the back and collapsing onto the ground. His blood flowed out, seeping into the earth.

Isn't it just death? Nie Yan lay there calmly where he collapsed. To silently pass away like this... Couldn't this also be considered a peaceful death of sorts?

He had lain in ambush for five whole days at the gates of the Cao Xu Mansion. There, he waited with great anticipation for Cao Xu to emerge. At the moment when Cao Xu nearly disappeared into his vehicle, Nie Yan pulled the trigger. Employing his sniper rifle, he delivered a bullet straight through Cao Xu's skull.「Bang!」Blood dyed the ground. Gazing through the scope from a distance, he saw a hole appeared in Cao Xu's head, his blood flowing out smoothly.

Cao Xu's eyes stared vacantly before finally becoming blank as the light in them gradually faded away.

Replaying the event in his mind, Nie Yan felt incomparable pleasure in his heart as he recalled the scene of the bullet piercing through Cao Xu's head. Naturally, it was because he had been unburdened of his hatred.

Cao Xu possessed a lifetime of glory and splendor, yet he died at the hands of a nobody like Nie Yan. Even if he became a ghost, Nie Yan wouldn't be too particularly bitter. In the face of death, everyone was at an equal standing. Even if he had the wealth to rival nations, it still hadn't been able to save his life.

Cao Xu had committed too many evils... It would be hard for him to escape retribution in the afterlife.

At the same moment when Cao Xu's brains were blown out, Nie Yan came to a realization. His perspective on life underwent a complete transformation. So everything in life was could be determined by no more than a single shot of a sniper rifle. Perhaps tomorrow his picture would appear plastered on the front page of the morning newspaper. The headline would read “Millionaire Cao

Xu Assassinated!” Below, a giant mug shot would lay on the page for the common people to revere and worship.

Immediately after Nie Yan had assassinated Cao Xu, Cao Xu’s personal bodyguards discovered his location and went in pursuit. They shot at Nie Yan, and a single bullet managed to hit him in the back.

He felt a burst of sharp pain. So this is how it feels to get shot... His heart gradually grew colder as his life force rapidly escaped his body.

Am I about to die? he thought, and let out a faint laugh. He laughed at the bitter shortness of life. He laughed at his life of confusion and hesitation. Only when he was about to die did he finally awaken to reality.

Shortly after this realization, tears began to streak down his cheeks.

The deep animosity he felt towards his parents had already ceased to exist. The events of the past were now replaying within his mind as if they were some kind of film. The only thing he longed for now in his fading time on this Earth was her faint, unblemished smile.

She was Nie Yan’s fellow classmate in high school. By now, she had already been engaged to someone else, yet her elegant and refined complexion remained engraved in Nie Yan’s mind; the same as it was in the past. Following the passage of time, her image

became all the more unforgettable. He wondered... When she receives the news of my death, of how I took Cao Xu out with me, how will she react? Will she sigh? Or perhaps... will she shed tears in grief?

The old memories of the past seemed to breach through their constraints and began flooding in. They were now drifting and floating within his mind. He was quite regretful. Sometimes, when you finally realize or understand the truth of something... it is already too late to do anything about it. In this lifetime he truly had too many regrets, too many unfulfilled desires...

Nie Yan reached out to grab at the empty air, wishing to grasp onto something... However, to his dismay, everything had gradually gone out of his reach. Alas, his life had finally reached its limit—up ahead lay only an eternally silent abyss.

Remorse and dismay resembled a dagger as it incessantly sliced at his heart; the pain in his chest was unbearable.

What wrongs have I committed in my past life for the Heavens to torment and punish me in such a way!?

Nie Yan's grievances soared to the Heavens. He was bitter. He screamed resentfully in his mind as teardrops continually tumbled down his cheeks.

The moment seemed to last forever, and Nie Yan was actually completely unaware of how much time had passed. Eventually, his mind calmed down and gradually became serene.

His mind was still active as he pondered away... Could it be...? Is this death? Perhaps, I'm in spirit form now?

For a long time Nie Yan felt sensations in his fingers, moreover, it felt real. Why, after all this time, why am I still conscious? He immediately sat up. Surveying his surroundings, he stared out blankly, at a complete loss.

Could it be...? Is this the underworld?

Nie Yan's dull eyes gradually began to regain their focus. As he looked around, a few old things entered his vision: a wooden bed, a chair, and a visibly damaged floor.

Where is this place? Didn't I already die?

He felt as if he were in a dream—having a sort of illusory sensation. He began feeling his back; his entire hand felt wet and sticky. However, as he moved his hand into view, he saw that his palm wasn't covered in blood but rather sweat. The wet sensation he felt earlier was due to the clothing on his back having been soaked wet in his own perspiration.

What's going on?

Didn't I lose a lot of blood? He vaguely recalled his blood being red. It was just like red wine, except with a scarlet tint; it was the colour of his life gradually fading away.

Nie Yan still felt pain after pinching himself. This really isn't a dream. Don't tell me... assassinating Cao Xu was a dream as well?

Why did it feel so real?

It was just as [Zhuang Zhuo](#) muttered as he awoke from a dream, "Am I Zhuang Zhuo who dreamt I was a butterfly, or a butterfly who dreamt it was Zhang Zhuo?"

How do I determine what is real, and what is a dream?

He surveyed his surroundings with a hint of doubt. There were just too many questions left unanswered.

Within the dim lighting, there was a shabby-looking wooden bed, chair, and desk. By the wall, there stood the grandfather clock his old man loved to exaggerate as a priceless antique.「Tick Tock Tick Tock」The sound it produced echoed into the silence. Nie Yan recalled that the clock's time had never been accurate, not even once.

It was as if his past memories were stored in an old photo album, they slowly began opening up.

This room here feels so familiar. Isn't this the house I lived in when I was in high school?

Through the gap in the window curtains, sunlight shone in. He felt a stinging sensation as the sunlight entered his eyes, causing his pupils to violently contract. This was a type of dazzling awakening into reality.

I'm still alive... Nie Yan stretched his right hand forward. He gazed at its tenderness and slight immaturity before noticing the sickly pale skin tone.

I... What's going on here? Am I myself from ten years in the past, or am I myself from ten years in the future? Nie Yan scratched his hair in great bewilderment.

Aligning his train of thought, a few fragments from his memories began emerging. Gradually, they became clearer and distinct.

This was the year he turned eighteen. It was summer vacation and his parents weren't home. He had developed a forty degree fever that summer and nearly died... Only through luck did he manage to keep his life.

During that time, his parents had left him with a bit of money—immediately afterward, they took off without a word of goodbye. They never returned home, not even after two or three months, and he wasn't able to reach them through their cellphones either. It was as if they had just vanished without a trace. At that time, he believed his parents didn't want him anymore. He was alarmed... terrified... scared. All kinds of emotions began to plague and burden him. In addition to this, he had also developed that high fever. The experience left a deep trauma within his heart. He became timid, cowering at the slightest breeze. It took him until

the age of twenty-five to begin correcting that personality to some extent.

Only afterwards, when he grew up, did he find out that his parents hadn't abandoned him on purpose. Rather, they had borrowed money from a family friend and started up a smuggling businesses at the country's borders. At that time, the country urgently needed a type of metal called [polonium](#); it proved to be an important strategic resource. Following every nation's discovery of this metal's usage, they rapidly began placing restrictions on its export and started hoarding the resource for themselves. It was unknown how Nie Yan's parents were able to find such a source. Although, in the end, they managed to smuggle the metal back into the country, selling it to the government at several hundred times the price they purchased it for. As a result, they earned a huge sum of money.

Their current circumstances at the time were very stressful and nerve-racking. Thus, Nie Yan's parents were unable to contact him through the phone. Furthermore, their matters were classified military secrets. If any information were to leak out, it would result in their deaths. As a consequence, Nie Yan and his parents' misunderstanding became buried in such a way. It took many years after the matter had passed for his father to inform him of the truth, and only then did Nie Yan forgive the both of them.

It was that year when his father had earned his first major payout and used it to establish a smelting company. Furthermore, he undertook and completed several large projects, advancing the company's reputation by leaps and bounds. He resolved his family's plight, and as a result, Nie Yan was transferred over to a high-class school within the city.

Is it possible? Have I really returned to that time?

I can start all over again from the beginning?

Nie Yan's current emotional state was hard to describe; pleasant surprise and nervous apprehension interweaved with each other as his emotions swayed all over the place. He was anxious that everything occurring now was simply a dream.

Nie Yan climbed out of his bed and opened the window curtains. Rays of sunlight were scalding as they released their scorching heat onto his skin. The sensation clearly informed him that at present, he truly wasn't dreaming.

He bent his head down to see that beside the windowsill lay his textbooks, arranged neatly on the table: mechanical theory, automation, language, advanced mathematics, A.I design, and so on...

Nie Yan flipped open a few pages. The familiar characters were like a clear stream. Along with his past memories, they rejuvenated his mind. These textbooks represented the youth that had passed by. After reaching his senior year of high school, he transferred to a high-class inner-city school. The projects that his father had undertaken succeeded. From then on, any materialistic desires he had were easily satisfied. His rise into becoming a well-off son of an entrepreneur caused him to turn lazy and idle. By the time he had graduated high school, his academic marks were definitely less than stellar. Afterwards, his father spent quite a bit

of money to allow him to attend a famous university. Only... by the time he graduated from university, he had learned absolutely nothing; he wasted every day sitting around idly.

When he reached the age of twenty-five, his father's business started suffering from the attacks of the Cao Xu Century Financial Group. Several family friends who were also trusted confidants were bribed by Cao Xu into betraying Nie Yan's father. Thus, his company met with several setbacks in quick succession... Money, once more, had become a concern for the family. His father committed suicide by overdosing on drugs, and his mother fell ill due to the grief. She eventually passed away in the end as well. Only after suffering the pain of losing both his parents did Nie Yan begin making progress in his studies—self-studying in numerous courses. However, by that time it was already too late. He had simply missed too many opportunities.

Once full of longing, Nie Yan was prepared to hew out a piece of the world for himself. However, how could Cao Xu allow the son of his former enemy to make a comeback? With Cao Xu interfering behind the scenes, there wasn't a single company who dared to hire him, leaving Nie Yan with nowhere to go. If it weren't for him playing the Virtual Reality game Conviction—scraping by with what little income he could earn by selling items, he wouldn't have been able to even eat a meal.

He had no hopes of gloriously defeating Cao Xu by rising to prominence as an underdog. However, an anxious hare could still give a nasty bite. Being at an impasse, Nie Yan's final decision was to take Cao Xu out with him. The sound of the gunshot vented out all of Nie Yan's resentments and loathing.

His destiny seemed bright and clear, so Cao Xu probably never thought his life would conclude in such a way.

Nie Yan believed himself to have died and never expected Time to play a joke on him, returning him to the summer vacation of his second year in high school.

And though he still wasn't able to contact his parents, he could at least be certain they were still alive. When he thought of this, tears began filling his eyes.

When a son wanted to provide for his parents yet the parents were already gone... No other person was capable of understanding the bitterness and grief in Nie Yan's heart.

The Heavens had given him another chance. He would absolutely never become confused and act indecisively again.

It would take a little over twenty days for his mother and father to return home. Since it was summer vacation right now, at the moment, he had no choice but to stay at home.

That year... in the latter half of the second semester during my second year of high school, if I recall correctly, the Virtual Reality game, Conviction, had just recently been released. Nie Yan distinctly remembered the scene of countless financial firms establishing a presence in Conviction's rapidly rising popularity on the year of the game's release. They poured tremendous amounts of resources into the large-scale development of this Virtual Reality game. It was truly due to these numerous financial firms that

Conviction deservedly became the second world for humanity.

After he entered the high-class inner city school, he was finally introduced to the game by his best friend, by that time a semester had already passed. Only by then, many people were already at a very high level. He had already missed the best period of time to begin leveling. Left behind, he had no choice but to try and catch up with all his might.

The faded pages of the photo album—his memory—once again turned anew, revealing their bright colours. The most unforgettable moments in his life had come from the time he'd spent in the game. He had come to know so many friends in that game. In the calendar of his life, it was only because of them that those days of loneliness had not appeared too excessively senseless.

Prior to assassinating Cao Xu, Nie Yan was formerly a Level 180+ Great Thief. Though he wasn't at the summit, he could barely be considered to be among the top experts.

Nie Yan suddenly recalled there was a bank card containing all of his savings in the drawer.

I have the money to buy a Virtual Reality helmet! Nie Yan thought to himself. Pulling open the drawer, he turned everything over, searching. At last, he found a silver-white bank card from the corner of the drawer. If he recalled correctly, the amount of money stored inside his bank account was two thousand credits; one credit the equivalent of one dollar. This money had come from him saving expenses on food and clothes over the course of several years. Back then, he wanted to buy the most advanced Model X3

computer. However, by the time he waited the several years needed to save up the money, the Model X3 had already become obsolete. Naturally, his pocket money was not merely this little after his father's business had become successful. Due to his father wanting to make it up to Nie Yan, he gave Nie Yan practically everything he asked for. Something he wanted...? If it could be bought, it would arrive.

Nie Yan was eighteen years old this year. However, he possessed the soul of his twenty-eight-year-old self. Everything would once again start anew. From henceforth, a new chapter in his life would open up. However, without the sufficient capital, he wouldn't be able to accomplish anything. So, he would start from the game. Using his prior experiences of the game, becoming a professional gamer and earning a little bit of money was a very simple affair.

Nie Yan remembered the time when Conviction's first gaming helmets had just begun selling. In an effort to make them spread, the prices were unusually cheap. There were three entry models: Model A, B, and C. Each entry model's configurations were unique. The immersion level of the Virtual Reality helmets ranged from 76%–98%. A sum of a thousand three hundred credits was enough to afford the cheapest model. With the current amount of money Nie Yan had stored in his savings, it was sufficient for him to purchase the lowest tier model Virtual Reality helmet.

He could clearly and distinctly recall many items and things from the game. If he started all over again, it wouldn't be too difficult for him to procure some results.

Placing his bank card within his pocket, he shifted his gaze

towards the advanced mathematics textbook on the side. As if God himself had just slightly nudged the textbook up, it trembled a little bit before a crisp new hundred dollar bill emerged and fell out. At that moment, he recalled several things as memories once again began floating into his mind.

He suddenly remembered that the first meeting between him and Xie Yao would occur today. He had taken the hundred dollar bill and left the house to buy medicine at the pharmacy.

Xie Yao was his deskmate during his senior year of high school, as well as the prettiest girl in his class. Once again, he reminisced on this past event, a segment of his life that he couldn't bear to look at without causing his wrists to tremble. After nearly a decade had passed, Xie Yao and the publically recognized gifted student in his class, Liu Rui, had fallen in love; the two of them had moved together to the Moon. Only after he and Xie Yao communicated through several calls did he find out Xie Yao was not the least bit happy. When matters relating to the past in his senior year of high school were brought up, both of them would sigh incessantly.

If he had just been a little bit more courageous... if only he wasn't so gutless and inferior in front of Xie Yao. Perhaps, he wouldn't have missed his chance...

Sometimes... there were decisions that lasted for an entire lifetime; they would become regrets that one would never be able to resolve.

At the time, Xie Yao always liked wearing a white skirt. Pure and beautiful, her appearance remained engraved deeply in Nie Yan's

heart. This sort of melancholic yearning was just like the sound of a flute playing in the evening, tranquil and far away in the distance...

Nie Yan glimpsed at the shabby-looking clock, the hands pointing to three o'clock. There still might be enough time! He picked up the hundred dollar bill, rushed down the stairs out, and out the door.

His family lived in a suburban district. It was extremely bleak. A shabby street that wasn't at all wide, and as the wind blew over, it picked up a lot of dust. Contrary to what one might expect, many trees were seeded on either side of the street. Under the blazing hot sunlight, they remained lush and flourishing, casting shade on the earth below them...

Greeted with a hot afternoon, no pedestrians could be seen walking by. Cars were also few and far between... Occasionally, one or two [hover cars](#) would drive by...

In the past, Nie Yan had loathed this town very much. However, after his reincarnation, as he once again met with this bleak place, Nie Yan did not feel loathing or disgust. To the contrary, he unexpectedly felt an amiable familiarity. This was the place he lived in when he was eighteen years old.

Before Nie Yan reached the age of twenty-five he was timid and weak; it was not unrelated to the living environment of the former years of his life. He was just a little boy from a small town whose family suddenly became wealthy, and because of this, he was transferred over to a high-class city school.¹ Originally during his

first and second year of high school, his academics could actually be regarded as pretty exceptional. However, by the end, it was the complete inverse. He was also frequently ridiculed for wearing tacky clothing. In addition to the events that occurred during that hot summer, it caused him to have a very low self-esteem and left behind many psychological insecurities. By the time he moved to a new environment, he had already become insecure and timid, seemingly never fitting in with everything and everyone. If he hadn't come to know several good friends, it would be hard to say he wouldn't have suffered a mental breakdown.

However, this was in the past. Presently, never did he expect that after going through an entire lifetime, he would return to where it all started. This time, he promised to himself that he would never repeat the mistakes of his previous self again.

He sprinted off towards the pharmacy.

The surrounding buildings looked somewhat shabby, there were no signs of human life... Following the increasing speed of the urbanization process, the people of this small town would migrate towards the dense crowds of large cities. And the area within this small town's borders would become increasingly desolate as the population became fewer and fewer. After a hundred years, this area would become demolished and once more change into an open field...

Over here is the school, and on the other side is the supermarket... Like an old horse that knew the way, Nie Yan gazed at the surrounding buildings with familiarity. His frame of mind gradually became more optimistic. I've gone back! I've truly gone

back!

In the past, he had always held a lot resentment towards his unjust fate. However, now he was grateful towards the Heavens.

I'm going to start all over again! I'll do it right this time! Nie Yan was tempted to scream these words at the top of his lungs, venting out all of the indescribable emotions he had held within his heart.

Notes:

[1\]](#) Chinese people start high school at grade 10, so they only have three years of high school as opposed to our four.

Chapter 2 – To Meet Once Again

Nie Yan increasingly neared the pharmacy. However, as he was crossing the road, as if by some supernatural occurrence, he tripped and fell hard onto the pavement.

[When one reaches the peak of happiness, sorrow is soon to strike.](#)

「Ssssss...ah.」Nie Yan hissed in pain. His hands felt numb from breaking the fall, and his knee was bleeding from scraping off the pavement.

Nie Yan sat up with great difficulty; his knee had been badly cut open, exposing raw flesh and blood.

At that time, a pink hovercar happened to be passing through the area. It halted, not far from where Nie Yan had fallen. The hovercar was of top quality, truly a rare sight in this peaceful little town. It appeared to be a limited edition hovercar, valued around ninety million dollars—something an ordinary family certainly couldn't afford.

A young lady in a white skirt appeared, stepping out after the car door was opened. Urgently, she ran over to where Nie Yan had fallen.

“Fellow student, are you alright?” A clear and pleasant voice appeared to be deeply concerned as it passed through Nie Yan's ears.

Hearing this voice so familiar to his heart, his soul began to tremble. He turned his head to look; if the person appearing before his eyes wasn't Xie Yao, then who else could it be?

She was wearing a white dress dotted with pink lace, her hair was tied behind her back as her clear and charming eyes gazed on with concern. Her cheeks, appearing still somewhat childish, were brimming with youth and life. She was still as beautiful as ever.

Nie Yan absentmindedly recalled the high school reunion that had occurred six years after his graduation. At that time, Xie Yao had become a successful businesswoman. She had worn a beautiful and enchanting [OL dress](#).

Time was indeed a wondrous thing—changing a pure and innocent young girl into a charming and beautiful woman... and at present, once again changing her back.

After a whole lifetime, I've met you again... Perhaps this is fate, our destinies rewinding like magnetic tape, placing us two once again at where we first encountered. Melodious music slowly began playing in his soul; every single note so pleasant and beautiful to listen to.

Nie Yan still kept the memories of the day he and Xie Yao had first come across each other; it had mirrored this exact scene. His eyes were moist, Xie Yao... I haven't seen you in such a long time. Are you still doing fine? In this lifetime, I'll never let you go again...

“Ah! Your knee is badly scraped, and it’s bleeding badly!” Xie Yao called out in alarm. After recalling that the first aid kit in her car still had a few bandages, she quickly ran back to retrieve them.

Nie Yan watched as Xie Yao returned to her vehicle. During his senior year, what he loved to do the most was follow her elegant little figure with his eyes. Glancing at her seductive figure, her knee length skirt revealed snow-white skin that resembled exquisite jade. On that topic, Nie Yan’s appearance also couldn’t be considered too bad. Following his father’s success, his financial circumstances had also become pretty good; he wasn’t the least bit inferior to Xie Yao. However, when facing her, he could never rouse up enough courage to interact with her.

His state of mind during senior year was odd and hard to fathom. Looking back as an adult, he felt he truly was too immature at the time.

Xie Yao grabbed the bandages and walked over to Nie Yan’s side. She then began disinfecting the wound with antiseptics. Moving with extreme care, she picked off the tiny bits of gravel with her delicate fingers.

“How can you cry? You’re already a grown boy. How could a little wound like this cause you to tear up? It’s not a very good appearance, you know!~”Xie Yao smiled teasingly while using her thumb to massage Nie Yan’s bruised knee.

When she smiled, the corners of her mouth exposed her slight

dimples, revealing a type of indescribably bright charm.

“When I fell, there was just a little dust that got into my eyes.” Nie Yan’s cheeks became a little red as he absentmindedly replied with an excuse. The real reason he had cried wasn’t due to the injury on his knee in the slightest. It was Xie Yao’s appearance which caused him to feel as if boiling hot water had been poured over his head. His state of mind was in a chaotic mess: an overwhelming amount of bitterness and joy mixed together wanted to surge out of him.

Xie Yao’s attention was singlemindedly focused on Nie Yan’s bruised knee.

Nie Yan raised his head and gazed at Xie Yao’s face as she leaned in towards him. Her skin, like flawless white jade, was tender and supple. A strand of black hair hung down as he gazed at the beautiful earrings that hung from her earlobes.

In the past when he and Xie Yao were deskmates, he always liked to secretly peek at her during class time. Though no matter how much he looked, he felt he could never look enough.

Xie Yao was without a doubt the prettiest girl in their class; however, other classes had very pretty girls too. Nie Yan, on the other hand, firmly believed Xie Yao was the most beautiful girl in the entire school.

After their first encounter, Nie Yan had never forgotten her. Later on, when he entered his senior year of high school, he was

surprised to discover the both of them were in the same class. Not only that... but they were also deskmates as well. He came to believe this occurrence was predestined. It wasn't until ten years later that he came to understand... even if two people were fated to be together, if one didn't properly seize their opportunity, they would miss their chance. By the time he became aware of this, it was already too late.

“How could you come here all by yourself!? This is a really dangerous area where a lot of criminals operate!” Nie Yan said in a genuinely concerned tone. It truly was an area occupied by many criminal organizations. An especially dangerous place for a beautiful young girl like Xie Yao to be alone.

“Don't underestimate me! I'm a third level black belt in taekwondo! After I turn twenty-one, I'll be able to advance onto the fourth level. If you don't believe me, then let me show you!” Xie Yao took up an open stance, then suddenly halted as her face turned dizzily red. She stalled and said, “Actually, nevermind... I'm wearing a skirt today, but I really am super strong!” Xie Yao said innocently without the slightest trace of scheming.

Nie Yan replied with a laugh, and after chatting with Xie Yao for a while, he confirmed that this young lady in front of him was indeed Xie Yao—the girl who was so sincere, lovable, lively, and carefree. Yet after graduating university and meeting up once again, that sort of lively innocence soon became something he could never see again. It turns out going through a stressful period of time would indefinitely change anyone...

Xie Yao began sizing Nie Yan up a bit. Compared to herself, he

seemed to be younger than her by a few years. His height was also roughly the same as hers, appearing to be only around a hundred seventy centimeters in height. The clothes he wore were a little dirty, possibly from falling over just now. Appearance wise—although he couldn't be regarded as handsome—he was passable. Only, she didn't seem to know why, but she felt an indescribable sort of familiarity and closeness towards Nie Yan. Unknowingly, they ended up chatting for quite a while.

“What school are you from? From your appearance... it looks as though you should be studying in middle school, right?” Xia Yao felt Nie Yan was a little bit foolish and empty-headed, so silly it was slightly adorable. Not minding the ground while he was running, many boys from middle school are foolish like this. They become a lot more mature by the time they reach high school though.

Although Nie Yan was eighteen years old right now, he had the wisdom of a twenty-eight-year-old. When he met with Xie Yao once again, Nie Yan was no longer the confused, ignorant little boy he had been in the past. His spirit had been refined and tempered by the passage of time; he had become calm and collected.

“Who said I'm in middle school? If it weren't for the country's child policy, my son would already be old enough to buy groceries himself!” Nie Yan replied jokingly. As a person, one shouldn't be so deadpan and boring.

“Your son? Buying groceries himself? Stop joking around!” Nie Yan's words had caused Xie Yao to burst out into laughter, causing her to giggle nonstop.

“I’m eighteen.”

“Are you really eighteen? You don’t look like you’re around my age,” Xie Yao said in surprise.

Due to being a bit malnourished, Nie Yan’s present height was evidently a bit short—around a hundred sixty-five centimetres tall. When his living conditions had improved later on, his height soared up to a hundred eighty centimetres by the time he had reached his senior year of high school. His current appearance still seemed that of a juvenile, and he really did look like a middle schooler. This was the reason why he had always looked a little depressed.

The most unfortunate thing for him, as a twenty-eight-year-old, was unexpectedly being told he looked like a middle school student. However, he really did look baby-faced at present, so there was nothing that could be done. “This is because my face looks naturally younger compared to others.”

“If you’re young, you’re young. You still won’t admit it?” Xie Yao replied giggling. She came to feel this Nie Yan was a pretty amusing person. All the boys in her class were always either shy when they met her, never knowing what to say, or haughty delinquents that brought her disgust.

The two talked for quite a while. Nie Yan appeared very comfortable when conversing with Xie Yao, occasionally teasing her with a few clever quips that made her laugh.

Nie Yan gazed at Xie Yao's smiling expression that was simply beautiful. It reminded him of the time he had graduated high school. He and Xie Yao had been deskmates for a year, and he had always believed the two of them could never form any sort of connection. They were two people from completely different worlds. He continued to admire Xie Yao in secret, gifting Xie Yao whatever she asked for. However, he had never made a demand for Xie Yao to remember a lowly person such as himself. Never did he expect that after graduation he would unexpectedly receive a gift from her. Perhaps, he really had left an impression in Xie Yao's heart.

What appeared in the gift was a photograph of Xie Yao as a twelve-year-old. At the time, she was still a chubby little fat girl. It was a picture that would only be shared with someone she considered herself to be close to.

After graduation, Nie Yan remained incapable of forgetting Xie Yao and both of them continued to stay in touch.

After being reborn, Nie Yan would never again allow himself to miss his opportunity.

Having once more encountered each other, Nie Yan's state of mind fell into somewhat of a daze. In his past life, and in his current life, he and Xie Yao shared an unbreakable bond tied by fate.

Her clear and limpid eyes stealthily glanced at Nie Yan's face,

sizing him up. Although Nie Yan wasn't particularly handsome, even looking very ordinary at first, and despite looking very childish, he had a very indescribable calmness. Perhaps it has to do with his personality?

“My name is Nie Yan (聂言). The Nie written with ‘pair’ (双) and ‘ear’ (耳), and the Yan written as ‘word’ (言) in ‘language’ (语言),” Nie Yan said while looking at Xie Yao eye to eye.

Xie Yao's charming face became flustered as she tried to avoid Nie Yan's gaze.

“I'm called Xie Yao...”

Nie Yan shifted his gaze downwards, stopping at Xie Yao's lips. They were a faint pink in colour—soft with a glossy allure. The previous Nie Yan in his senior year of high school would absolutely never dare to gaze at Xie Yao's face in such a way. He had only dared to stealthily sneak glances at Xie Yao's beautiful face from the corner of his eye.

“My father is still waiting for me, so I-I'll be leaving first... I felt very happy chatting with you today. But remember, you can only remove your bandage by tomorrow! You definitely can't remove it any earlier!” Xie Yao didn't feel assured, so she repeatedly warned Nie Yan as she stood up.

Nie Yan attempted to move his knee a bit, and noticed that he was able to do so without issue—the wound was only superficial.

“I’m alright. I can already walk again, so you should go back now. Also, thank you for today,” Nie Yan replied. Despite wanting to talk with Xie Yao for a little while longer, he ended up walking back to the curb. They would be studying at the same high-class city school in the future, and he would have plenty of opportunities to get to know her then.

“I’ll be leaving first then...”

“Bye bye,” Nie Yan replied smiling, as he began strolling away. As he walked up to the pharmacy, he couldn’t help but feel a little sentimental in his heart. After briefly meeting one another, they parted once again.

Xie Yao sat in her hovercar and started it back up.

Nie Yan turned his head and glanced back, but by that time Xie Yao’s hovercar had already departed. They had met in the past like this, completely by accident. However, it didn’t go as smoothly as this last time as the previous him hadn’t even been able to form a single coherent word in front Xie Yao. The Xie Yao back then had wrapped up his leg with a bandage and left right after. Though it was this chance encounter, caused by his carelessness, that allowed Xie Yao to leave an inerasable mark in his heart. It was to the extent where he had never forgotten her.

Reincarnating is such a wonderful thing; everything could once again start afresh. Nie Yan then came to think, his everything could very likely be snatched away by Cao Xu in a couple of years down the road. In his mind rose a strong sense of urgency... He had to become much more powerful to be able to protect everything

that he held dear.

Thinking about Cao Xu, Nie Yan's heart gradually grew colder. This was a loathing that penetrated deep into one's marrow—to the extent where he felt not the slightest hesitation in putting a bullet through his enemy's head.

However, for now, all he was currently able to do was seize his opportunity and enter Conviction as quickly as possible, to set up an early foundation in the game. Conviction was unlike any other game, naturally because it was humanity's second world. The game had transformed the entire globe. Nie Yan could obtain what he wanted by playing Conviction.

At the pharmacy, he bought a few packets of cold medicine. As he swallowed it down, he immediately felt his body relax as his fever receded. At present, he felt the medicine's effects were very satisfactory.

After he finished up in the pharmacy, he walked over to the department store in the area. He planned to buy a Virtual Reality helmet.

Every department store had a dazzling lineup of products within. They had many kinds of appliances and devices; so many, they couldn't be counted. For the most part, they were all smart devices. There were some products Nie Yan wasn't even able to name. This place had no sales representatives; you only need swipe your card and you'd be able to receive whatever you wanted to buy.

Half a day had passed since Nie Yan left his house, and finally, he had reached the section where they sold Virtual Reality helmets. They were displayed one by one stacked on top of the wall. It was a feast for the eyes; there were three entry models differentiated by thousands of styles, patterns, and designs.

The lowest price was thirteen hundred credits while the most expensive reached upwards of a million and two hundred thousand credits.

The higher the price, the better the configuration. You get what you pay for, and at present Nie Yan could only afford the cheapest configuration.

Besides the currently available Virtual Reality helmets, there were also limited edition ones that could be purchased only by making a reservation. Their prices reached upwards of sixty million credits.

Regarding these helmets, at present, Nie Yan could only wish for them in his thoughts—nothing more.

Nie Yan swiped his card at the register. He had chosen a light-blue coloured helmet and furthermore bound it to his identity. Once his identity was registered to the helmet, it could only be used by him from then on.

Conviction had only been released seven days ago, thus the highest leveled player was probably only level 5. So he still had

plenty of time to catch up.

After having been reborn, he should be able to effortlessly obliterate any opponent in his way in a grand and imposing manner. “Step up to the highest peak, and all mountains below will be seen as insignificant.”

Chapter 3 – Haggling

Nie Yan glanced back at the clock, it was already half past three. Conviction's game servers were open from five in the afternoon to nine in the morning—sixteen hours total. In this way, it wouldn't be a hindrance to the common person's work schedule. Thus, everyone's game time was more or less equivalent. Hence, it made it unlikely for any single player to create a large disparity in level compared to the rest of the player-base. In addition, Conviction's Virtual Reality technology exceeded perfection. As a result, it gained increasing popularity, eventually becoming popular all over the globe. It gradually transformed into an absolute necessity in everyone's life.

This was the world that had become dominated by Virtual Reality technology; it had become a perfect system. Five months later, Conviction would complete this system by connecting virtual currency with the real world economy, thus completely merging into humanity's livelihood.

With such a high rate of player retention, the player-base was able to grow to a tremendous amount. It spurred the increasing consumption of Virtual Reality in the rest of the world. The amount of time the world spent playing Conviction every year was so astronomical, it was to the extent that it surpassed the amount of time they spent in reality. The emergence of numerous new consumer groups caused the creation of a great number of service industries, a vast majority of which targeted the professional gaming community.

Almost every financial group had established a presence in Conviction. Following the establishment of his father's business—

after the company had produced decent earnings—Nie Yan's father also began participating in Conviction's rising popularity. He put up a large sum of money into the game as well. Though in the end, due to suffering a crushing defeat, it resulted in the company and its assets being brought to ruin. This allowed Cao Xu the opportunity to seize even more of an advantage... Nie Yan absolutely wouldn't allow such a situation to occur again.

Establishing an early presence in Conviction was essential, and it was crucial that he mustn't fail. Nie Yan needed to first help his father by paving the road ahead. Only when his father begins injecting funds into Conviction, will he be able to establish an uninterrupted chain of funding and take the first steps towards success. This would prevent any problems from arising in the future.

Nie Yan made a stop and ate out for dinner, spending thirty dollars. By the time he had arrived home, it was already nearing five o'clock.

After putting on his helmet, he calmly waited for Conviction to boot up.

Twelve minutes had passed. The helmet's display gradually illuminated, revealing the time to be [05:00 PM]. Abruptly, a lively jingle began playing, echoing through his ears. The tune felt familiar; it had been something he'd heard countless times in the past. He never felt any particular attachment towards it. However, it currently felt strangely pleasant to his ears.

「System: Do you wish to create an account?」

“Yes!”

「System: Please select your country.」

There were three factions you could choose from when entering Conviction. The first was the righteous faction who guarded the light. This faction consisted of the Viridian (Ge-lín-lan) Empire and Satreen (Sa-te-en) Empire. The Viridian Empire was a nation ruled by humans and governed by an Elder Parliament. The Satreen Empire, on the other hand, was a nation formed from the alliance between dwarves, beastmen, and elves. The second was the evil faction who guarded the darkness; it was ruled by a tyrant who reigned over both the devils and undead. For people who didn't enjoy conflict, there was a third faction which was neutral and ruled by the irenic giant tribe.

In the past, Nie Yan had chosen the Tempest Thief-profession of the Viridian Empire, which meant he was also quite familiar with the landscape of the empire. Furthermore, he was well acquainted with the Tempest Thief's skills and profession missions. If he had chosen a different starting nation, then the superior advantage he had gained from being reborn wouldn't be worth much in the end.

Nie Yan held a special type of affection for the Tempest Thief-profession. After all, he had dedicated nearly a decade of painstaking effort into it. The Level 180 Thief represented the height of his glory.

When he considered all these factors, he selected the Tempest

Thief as his profession once again—just as he had in the past.

「System: You've chosen to start in the Viridian Empire.」

「System: You've selected Tempest Thief as your profession.」

「System: Please name your character.」

(涅槃)Nie (炎)Yan

“Nirvana Flame!” Nie Yan chose the same name as he had in the past. “Nirvana Flame”—though these words were pronounced in the same way as his real name when they were spoken, they presented the meaning of a phoenix entering nirvana and being reborn.

「System: Successfully created character name. The character Nirvana Flame has been created.」

The game automatically blurred the player's true appearance after entering. Then, the system would conduct minor alterations to the face of the player's character. Under normal circumstances, the appearance of the player's character and the player's actual appearance were vastly different. It would actually be quite difficult to recognize a player in real life. However, the actual beauty or ugliness of the character was more or less equivalent to how it would be outside the game.

Nie Yan opened his status window and took a look at his own stats.

Character: Nirvana Flame

Level: 0

HP: 100/100

Rage: 0/100

Stats:

Strength: 2

Intellect: 2

Awareness: 2

Agility: 2

Physique: 2

Charisma: 2

Defense: 2 (Defend Rate 20%)

Resilience: 1

Willpower: 0

Focus: 5

Stealth: 0 (The current skill is empty)

Cloak: 5

Search: 5

Move Speed: 5 (Weight Modifier 0)

Attack: 3 (Hit Rate 10)

Reflex: 2

Balance: 5

Jump: 5 (Short Range: 0.9 yards) (Medium Range: 1.5 yards)

(Long Range: 3.0 yards)

Magic Resistance: 0 (Magic Defend Rate 0%)

Attack Speed: 5 (Weapon Modifier 0 Weight Modifier 0)

Weight: 0 / 60 lb (Weight Modifier +10)

Light Load: 0 - 20 lb (maintain under 20lb for agile movement)

Medium Load: 20 - 30 lb (regular movement)

Heavy Load: 30 - 50 lb (slow movement)

Character Race Attribute: Humans possess knowledge many races wish for. Every five levels, Intellect +3

Thief Profession Trait I: Every five levels receive a trap exemption bonus

Thief Profession Trait II: Mounting a sneak attack towards an enemy's back causes an additional 30% attack bonus.

Human Thief Profession Trait: Excellent Intellect allows them to be proficient in employing all kinds of tools and enchanted items.

Profession Skills:

Beginner Evasion (+2 Reflex)

Beginner Weapon Mastery: Dagger (+1 Attack)

Beginner Cloaking (+2 Cloak)

Beginner Marksmen (Able to use bow and crossbow)

Tempest: Thieves are agile in the use of their fingers.

These were the base stats for every type of Thief in the beginning of the game. Furthermore, at Level 0, the system gave five stat points and one skill point.

Nie Yan took a glance at his status window. When he had chosen the Tempest Thief profession in the past, he had added one point in Strength, two points in Dexterity, and two points in Physique in order to make himself more durable. In turn, it caused him to have a very weak attack power and slow attack speed during the initial stages of the game, causing him to waste a lot of his time trying to level. In reality, thieves never required a lot of HP at the start of the game. In the past, when he thought about this failure and all the time he had wasted, Nie Yan couldn't help but drop his shoulders down and sigh many times, wishing he could delete and restart again. This time around, he wouldn't repeat such a disastrous mistake again.

This time, he added three points into Strength and two points in Dexterity. He had concluded this was the most optimum ratio, after taking into account the leveling habits of his previous life. He took another glance at the status window after allocating all of his stat points.

Attack 5 → 6

Hit Rate 10.0 → 10.6

Movement Speed 5.0 → 5.4

Attack Speed 5 → 5.6

There were also profession masteries. Regarding these Thief profession masteries, a majority of thieves from the Human race

would choose to add their first skill point into either Evasion, Weapon Mastery, or Cloaking. Nie Yan was also prepared to add his first skill point into Weapon Mastery, but he stopped suddenly. After a moment of careful consideration, he decided to add his first skill point into Marksmen.

Beginner Marksmen → Intermediate Marksmen: Rapid Reloading +3, Firing Range + 3, Attack when using crossbow/bow +3, Ignore Level difference + 3 (Thief Profession Modifier + 1),

Profession skills were divided into five levels. Beginner→Intermediate→Advanced→Expert→Specialist. One could not advance further after reaching Specialist. However, there were many types of profession skills, and different professions were allowed to upgrade different profession skills.

Human thieves were proficient in a variety of tools and enchanted items. Bows and crossbows belonged to this category, which is why those with Intermediate Marksmen received an additional attack bonus when they were used.

After assigning his stats, Nie Yan's scenery shifted and he soon appeared at the transport point within Calore (Ka-luo-er) City. Encompassing the surroundings were rows upon rows of towering buildings. Every building in Calore City was pure white and possessed an incomparable brilliance. At the center of the city stood a white spire which towered through the skies. Not too far from the spire was an equally magnificent pure white sculpture that stood several hundred meters in height. Holding onto a Magician's scepter, it had a solemn and dignified expression. This was, of course, the protector of the Viridian Empire, Qiao Biya the

Great.

People were arriving and departing as they moved through the main streets, which were bustling with noise and excitement.

Evening in reality was actually early morning within the game. The light of daybreak enveloped and warmed the top of every building as if a blanket of silver white light had been laid over all of Calore City.

Calore City was the capital of the Viridian Empire; it was a floating city that lay suspended over the Calore Prairies. From the city, numerous transport points connected to various other cities, towns, and villages.

“Selling top rate White-tier dagger (Attack +2)! It’s better than the novice dagger (Attack +1), and only costs two copper coins! Only three left in stock until they’re all sold out!” A Level 3 Arcane Mage had currently set up shop near the transport point. Many beginners were crowding in front of his store.

Every new person who enters the game receives ten coppers in their inventory as their starting capital. Even though they felt their hearts ache, many people still purchased one of these daggers for the sake of training a little bit faster in the initial stages of the game.

Nie Yan snorted in disdain. On the map, the same daggers could be found in Level 1–5 villages being sold for only one copper. Furthermore, Level 0 players could easily walk up to a transport

point and teleport to one of these villages free of charge. They could purchase one of these daggers from an NPC, and then come back—all within two or three minutes.

In his previous life, he had also foolishly bought one of these daggers, only to find out he had been cheated later on.

The nearby towns each had their own stores; the small town of Link had a clothing shop, Joseph Town had a hat and shoe store, and Locke Town had a shop that sold weapons. Nie Yan teleported back and forth three times through the transport points. He spent six coppers to switch out his defenseless beginner equipment for better gear. Each piece of equipment gave him an increase in Defense. He gained 1–2 Defense each from equipping his new footwear, headgear, shoulder guards, and leg protectors. He also gained an additional 2–3 Defense from equipping cloth armour.

These were all lessons he had learned from his past experiences. Taking a look at his Defense, it had now become 8–13. If beginner thieves at Level 2 or 3 weren't resourceful enough in keeping their equipment up with their levels, they would also have this little bit of defense.

After taking a stroll around the marketplace, he discovered a Level 3 Paladin selling Thief profession Stealth skill books. He was selling six books for six coppers each in his store. Many of the low-level thieves could only gaze from afar due to the price of these skill books being so expensive.

The Paladin had the appearance of a man in his twenties. His stature was tall and robust. it would've been pretty good if he had

chosen to be a Warrior, but he was still passable as a Paladin.

Paladins were guardians of the Temple of Light. They could learn holy skills passed down from the Temple such as certain offensive enchantments or healing skills. Furthermore, they had decent close combat skills and could provide supportive party buffs for teammates at the same time. They were a pretty balanced profession in every aspect. Silencing Paladins were Paladins that could learn Silence—a divine skill that could suppress Mages, Priests, and other Mage type professions.

“How much for this Stealth skill book?” Nie Yan asked as he bent down and picked up the skill book from the cloth mat that was spread out on the ground. The Stealth skill was an essential skill for a beginner Thief. Luckily, though, the Stealth skill book had a very high drop rate from the various monster spawn points, so it wasn’t too expensive.

“You’ve already seen it, the price is six coppers,” the Paladin replied, pursing his lips into a frown.

“Aren’t you just trying to rip people off? A Silencing Paladin like you can easily hunt down the Fallen Shamans around Link Town. You could easily farm out six skills books in a day, and still not lose any health. It’s definitely much easier to make money this way compared to farming Goblins. Aren’t you ashamed of yourself, selling at such a high price? Three coppers, and not a copper more.” Nie Yan haggled down the price to half.

“How could it be as easy as you described? Do you even know much I spend on potions a day? If I sold it to you for three coppers,

I basically wouldn't be making any money! My lowest offer is five coppers." The Paladin was shocked by Nie Yan's words and had taken quite a while to reply. He definitely wasn't the type of person who was calculating and skillful at deceiving others. At a glance, this new player in front was definitely a well-informed customer, definitely not someone to be easily fooled.

"That's because the place you're farming monsters at is inefficient. If you farm the Fallen Shamans at these coordinates, [22385.21338.23329], you can easily get at least ten skill books a day. Not only that, you won't waste a lot of money on potions as well. Three coppers, not a single copper more. If you don't want to sell, then I'll just take my leave." Nie Yan had inspected this Paladin. He had a [squarish jawline](#) with slightly grown out stubble, and his appearance didn't seem too despicable.

Chapter 4 – Flying Stone

“W-wait a minute! What did you say those coordinate numbers were? Does that place truly drop many Stealth skill books?” the Paladin hurriedly asked. After hearing the manner in which Nie Yan had spoken in, he somewhat began to believe this passing Thief.

“[22385.21338.23329], the location is near the Fallen Shaman Camp, but it’s still a fair distance away. The area should be absolutely safe. After farming for around twenty minutes, a Fallen Shaman should spawn once every five seconds. A Silencing Paladin like you can train there up until they hit Level 5. Brat, you’re still too inexperienced. If this great master were to casually hand out even a little bit of game advice, you’d be able to receive endless benefits!” Nie Yan shamelessly boasted while patting the Paladin’s shoulder. “How about it? Give me another discount?”

“Four coppers, I won’t go any lower.” The Paladin was still skeptical about Nie Yan’s words. However, he was indeed able to obtain around six skill books a day by farming the Fallen Shamans outside of the Fallen Shaman Camp, just as Nie Yan had said. Though this Fallen Shaman Camp... he had gone there once before and nearly lost his life. The location in the coordinates Nie Yan provided should definitely lead him right outside of that same camp.

Nie Yan’s words completely matched this information, so it probably shouldn’t be false. The Paladin muttered to himself and began pondering.... Should I head over to those coordinates and take a look myself?

“Three coppers, if you’re not willing then I’ll be taking my leave. However, if you’re willing to give me this book as a gift, I’ll give you some more valuable information regarding the Fallen Shaman Camp.” Nie Yan gave an incentive. After seeing the Paladin still appearing hesitant, he turned his body and prepared to depart.

Nie Yan was embarrassingly short on funds. He didn’t have a lot of money to spend on the Stealth skill book. However, it was still essential for every Thief during the early stages of the game. This truly won’t do. I’ll have to put it off for later. At least until I can manage to get a bit of money grinding off Level 1 mobs in the beginning area....

“W-wait, hold up!” Seeing Nie Yan about to leave, the Paladin hurriedly called out to him. He hastily picked up a Stealth skill book from the little shop he had set up and said, “Isn’t it merely a single Stealth skill book...? I can easily farm out six of them in a day! Here! I’ll give this to you as a present. Now tell me, what’s information you have on this Fallen Shaman Camp?” It just so happened that he and his companions would be setting off to train in that area shortly. Thus, he really wanted to be as informed as possible about the area. In the Paladin’s eyes, Nie Yan certainly did appear to be a very knowledgeable person.

Nie Yan glanced back at him. This Paladin does seem to be an honest person. I was able to secure a Stealth skill book, and I didn’t even need to spend a single penny. Recalling this, Nie Yan was in a great mood.

“Seeing as you’re being sincere. Don’t head over to the

coordinates I just gave you. If you really did head over there looking to train, then not even within five minutes passing, three Fallen Shaman Leaders would appear. A single cast of their Fireball would cause an explosion that would kill you instantly,” Nie Yan casually informed.

Upon hearing these words, the Paladin instantly broke out in a cold sweat as he felt a great chill run through his heart. When Nie Yan informed him that those coordinates were a good place to farm, he truly intended to head over there and try his luck. He never expected that not only were these coordinates false, they were also dangerous as well. If he hadn’t hurriedly called Nie Yan back... one could only imagine the consequences. It would have truly been an injustice if he had been killed in such a way.

Nie Yan was simply too cunning—not even raising a single finger, and he entrapped someone.

Originally, the Paladin still felt a bit regretful giving away the Stealth skill book. However, at present, he became incredibly overjoyed. There was basically no comparison between his life and a single Stealth skill book. Dying in the game would result in losing a level along with losing a random piece of equipment. It turns out being a kind and sincere really does have its own benefits.

Noticing the Paladin gazing at him with such an aggrieved expression, Nie Yan flashed a slight smile and said, “The real coordinates are [22325.21383.23359]. You can farm out ten Stealth skill books from there. The spawn rate is pretty good too, so it’s definitely a good place to train. I’m not lying to you this time around. This is my way of expressing gratitude for gifting me this

beginner skill book. Then, I guess this could be considered your payment? As for the Fallen Shaman Camp... naturally, it's a twenty-person instance. There's a requisite of seventy-two defense for Warriors. Regarding Paladins and Priests, the requisites are also similarly high. Paladins must have a willpower of eight and Priests are required to learn the Heal skill. The strength of their Heal must also reach thirty points. Not only this... but when entering the camp, you must bring an ample supply of health and mana potions."

"The requirements are too high. Would I still be able to enter if my willpower is only seven points? The Heal skill books are also too expensive as well. The influx of new players has caused the skill book to skyrocket to an extremely expensive price. It's to the point where it has no set market value. Our party consists of only one Priest, and the reason we want to enter the Fallen Shaman Camp is because we need to obtain the Heal skill book for him. So tell me... if we don't meet these requirements, can we still enter the Fallen Shaman Camp?" the Paladin asked.

"Entering is definitely possible. However, you'll need to use a special method to enter."

"What kind of special method?" the Paladin asked curiously.

Nie Yan smiled wordlessly. In the future, he would most likely enter the Fallen Shaman Camp as well. If others wanted him to inform them about this special method, then they must be willing to pay a sufficient price.

"All party quests are divided into five difficulties: Easy, Normal,

Hard, Expert, and Specialist. If you guys are unsure of yourselves, then you should select the Easy difficulty. Speaking of which, it really shouldn't be too difficult. If you guys don't meet the requirements, then you simply need to just keep upgrading, that's all." Nie Yan looked at him meaningfully. He can't possibly think that a single Stealth skill book would allow him to candidly obtain the special method for entering the Fallen Shaman Camp, could he?

Although Nie Yan was only Level 0, he still gave off the appearance of a professional. The Paladin began weighing his thoughts and in the end, he still trusted Nie Yan's words.

"Thank you," the Paladin sincerely expressed his gratitude.

Nie Yan couldn't help smiling. The person before him was forced to give him a skill book free of charge, and he still thanked him in the end—this was truly adorable. In his previous life, Nie Yan was also such a sincere type of person. Only after experiencing many difficulties and setbacks, he slowly became cunning and sly. Although he felt this Paladin was very stupid, Nie Yan had a good impression of him. While tossing the skill book in his hands, he muttered, "We each take what we need."

Just as Nie Yan turned around and started to leave, the Paladin called out to him, "Expert, what's your name? Why don't we add each other as friends? That way, if I ever meet up with a problem I can't solve, I'll still be able to ask you for advice."

"Sure, but it'll cost you. I'm not one who offers a free service," Nie Yan replied. He definitely didn't want to give out information

for free.

“That’s not a problem,” the Paladin replied straightforwardly.

“Alright then, my name is Nirvana Flame.” If this person was able to give a sufficient price, Nie Yan felt there would be no harm in sharing some information. He’ll just consider it earning a bit of extra income.

“My name is Flying Stone, though all my friends just call me Stone,” the Paladin named Stone replied. He had already considered Nie Yan to be one of his friends.

“That’s fine. I have a few matters to attend to. So, I’ll be leaving first. See you later!” Nie Yan said his goodbyes to Stone and walked over to the transport point. He wanted to learn the Stealth skill quickly. A Thief’s defense and health were too low when compared to other close combat professions. In the initial stages of the game, he would only be able to train on the weak mobs that were the same level as him. Not only that, but he could only fight them one on one too. If he were to face a more powerful mob or perhaps... two or more monsters, then his only option would be to flee for his life. Thieves were unlike Warriors, who possessed the ability to fight two monsters of the same level. If the Warrior had decent equipment, then they’d be able to face off against three or more monsters. Therefore, unless a Thief was training in a party, their leveling from beginning to end was much slower when compared to Warriors, Mages, and other similar professions.

Currently, the highest level player among them was Level 5, while the highest level Thief was only Level 4.

At the start, thieves must continuously make money in order to buy skill books. Only after getting plenty of skills would their strengths finally begin to emerge—which would additionally cause their training speed to gradually increase.

At present, Nie Yan had gained the first ability in his skill bar, Stealth.

Stealth was the bread and butter skill for all thieves—their most basic and most powerful skill.

Nie Yan transported over to Tellak (te-la-ke) town. This was one of the most ordinary towns within the Calore Prairies—it was an NPC settlement. The houses were made of clay and mud, which exuded prairie-like characteristics. There were many Level 2 players in the area. Hence, the place was bustling with movements.

The monsters surrounding these small settlements ranged from Level 1–10.

There were Level 2–3 players everywhere in small towns. They were either trading goods or looking to form parties to hunt monsters. The streets were filled with noise and excitement. When walking down the streets, one could easily feel a bit claustrophobic.

If he recalled correctly, there was a silver treasure chest near the Wildcat region of Tellak town. In his previous life, he had discovered it while farming monsters in that region. He had

obtained a high-quality Thief skill book from the chest. However, it was an area that contained Level 5 monsters. Fortunately, no one should have reached that location yet.

When teams formed parties to level, players would usually split into groups of three or four. Otherwise, the experience definitely wouldn't be worth it. If ten or more were to form a party to hunt, then the experience gained would be too minuscule after being split. In general, three to five people in a party were able to train in an area where Level 5 monsters spawned, however, this was also rarely seen.

Treasure chests were graded from White Treasure Chests, Silver Treasure Chests, Gold Treasure Chests, Dark Gold Treasure Chests, Legendary Treasure Chests, etc... The higher ranked the treasure chest, the better the items that would come out of it. The items inside the chests were set, so once they were removed, the chest would disappear.

Although he was only Level 0, after obtaining the Stealth skill, Nie Yan had come up with a few ideas on how to obtain that silver treasure chest.

Chapter 5 – Vital Strike

Towns contained only the most rudimentary of buildings: general stores, low-level equipment shops, personal storages, etc... Even NPCs were sparse in number, and these NPCs were quest givers. For the most part, these simple quests consisted of gathering and collecting various items, hunting and killing an animal to collect its fur, collecting herbs, ores, and so on. After completing these quests, one would be rewarded with either money or experience.

After arriving at the general store, Nie Yan went forward and bought three Basic Health Potions. One potion would restore upwards of thirty health, and each potion was priced at a single copper. General stores only offered Basic Health Potions. Middle-or higher-tiered potions could only be purchased from an Alchemist.

Following the purchase of his three potions, only a single copper remained in Nie Yan's pockets.

Nie Yan walked outside and went out of the town's boundaries. After leaving the town, he hurriedly rushed over to the treasure chest's spawn point. If he met a monster, he would make a detour around it and maintain his distance.

The place he was heading towards was a Level 5 monster area. At present, with his current level, the danger was very high. However, with his experience currently at Level 0: 0.00%, even if he died, he wouldn't lose any experience.

Nie Yan passed through two Level 1 monster zones, a Level 3 monster zone, and a Level 4 monster zone. After four minutes, Nie Yan had finally arrived at the monster zone where Level 5 Wildcats spawned.

After surveying the surrounding area, he saw dense pastures and lush grass that could reach up to one's waist. Gazing at a distant area in the dense pastures, he saw a tall willow rising above the vegetation. It appeared to be especially lofty and majestic as it occupied its own space within the pasture.

The silver treasure chest wasn't far from this location. Nie Yan's heart began to tense up with nervousness as he grew closer.

At his current level, the Level 5 Wildcats in this area weren't monsters that Nie Yan was capable of dealing with.

Occasionally one or two Wildcats would pass through the area, and Nie Yan would hurriedly conceal himself.

Thieves possessed a passive profession skill which raised their ability to conceal themselves. Once they went into hiding, it wouldn't be easy for other lifeforms to detect them.

At the same time, he was still able to use his Stealth skill.

Nie Yan began calculating the level difference formula for Stealth in his head. After using Stealth, the safe distance between him and a Wildcat should be about two meters. In other words, if he went

within two meters of a Wildcat while he was in stealth, he would be discovered. Between two and three meters was the buffer zone where he could possibly be discovered. Beyond three meters he was at an absolutely safe distance.

Having spent over a decade playing the Thief profession in his previous life, Nie Yan's usage of these Thief skills had long been tempered to perfection. In addition, using his vision to estimate distance also wasn't too hard of a feat.

Suddenly, the underbrush in the distance began to tremble and stir with movement. Nie Yan's complexion rapidly changed as he quickly went into hiding by activating Stealth.

A Wildcat that was as large as a German Shepherd pounced out of the thickets. Its sharp eyes surveyed the surroundings, but it didn't discover anything strange. As it passed through the open space that lay ahead, it entered into another patch of grass and disappeared.

Only when he was assured the Wildcat had gone far away did Nie Yan dare to continue moving forward.

There was a stretch of open space in a ten-meter radius around the willow. A silver white chest quietly lay at the base of the willow tree. The nearby area had six to seven Wildcats roaming around freely.

To clear out these Level 5 Wildcats would require a team of at least twenty Level 3 players.

It would not be easy getting ahold of this chest.

Nie Yan observed the movements of these Wildcats within the thickets of grass, as he attempted to find a safe route to the willow tree.

Their movements appeared to have a fixed pattern.

After observing for a while, Nie Yan removed all the equipment from his body and stored them in his inventory. He then re-equipped his defenseless beginner equipment. If his beginner equipment were to be sold to an NPC store, they wouldn't be worth even a single copper. Simply put, they were trash. Even if one were to throw them on the ground, no one would bother picking them up.

Dying in Conviction would result in the loss of a level. Additionally, a random piece of equipment would also be dropped upon death. If the new equipment he had just recently bought dropped unexpectedly, then that would truly be wasteful. However, if the beginner equipment dropped, he wouldn't care. He was only equipping it to temporarily to cover his body anyway.

While using his Stealth skill, Nie Yan slowly crept towards the willow tree. He walked for approximately ten seconds, before suddenly stopping and holding his breath. A Wildcat was making its way around Nie Yan's left flank—within approximately two meters.

After waiting for six seconds, Nie Yan pressed onwards once again—carefully exercising control over his distance between each Wildcat.

Gradually, the distance between him and the chest shortened.

Nie Yan's heart rate sped up once again. He understood that as a Level 0, if he succeeded in grabbing this skill book, then it would be immensely helpful in the future.

Two wildcats began moving towards Nie Yan's location.

Nie Yan quickly halted, but the wildcats continued their advance. Fortunately, the distance between them was still about two meters apart. Nie Yan was frightened badly as he felt a cold sweat run down his back.

Stealth had a total duration of two minutes, and time was ticking away. Knowing that Stealth's effects would end within thirty-two seconds, Nie Yan's state of mind began to fluctuate.

There's not enough time...! Nie Yan slightly accelerated his pace.

Not far from where Nie Yan was located, a Wildcat moved slightly. It became aware of Nie Yan's location almost immediately. After locking its eyes onto Nie Yan, the Wildcat exposed its sharp teeth and let out a hoarse growl.

Not good, I was discovered!

The Wildcat moved, pouncing towards Nie Yan.

The Wildcat's sudden attack was quick, and Nie Yan's movement speed meant that he was basically incapable of keeping up. However, Nie Yan still managed to sidestep out of the way of the Wildcat's attack by relying on his reaction speed—something he had developed during his past life.

The basic movements for a character were sidestepping, rolling, jumping, etc... Players were able to utilize these movements to dodge attacks—as long as it was within the capabilities of the system.

The sharp claws of the Wildcat swiped through empty air, missing Nie Yan's throat by just an inch.

Just as Nie Yan had dodged, two more Wildcats appeared and pounced at him from the sides. One of them clawed at him from the back, while the other bit into his arm.

****, I'm finished!

Under these circumstances, using health potions would be useless.

Two damage values floated over Nie Yan's head. He collapsed to the ground as his health fell to zero.

The scenery changed, and Nie Yan found himself resurrected at the cemetery in Tellak town.

His failure was a result of using Stealth too early. When Stealth's duration was nearly up, he had become impatient and mistakes were made. This was the root cause that led him to failure.

Nie Yan summed up all the causes of his failure and continued forward. As he glanced at the equipment on his body, he noticed that his armguards had been dropped. However, it was only a piece of beginner equipment. Even if it dropped, it wouldn't be too alarming. As for losing experience... it didn't matter because he was still at Level 0: 0.00%.

He had already created a plan in case he ended up dying, which was why he dared to venture into an area with Level 5 monsters.

Nie Yan set off once more. After he had left the boundaries of Tellak town, he went back over to where the Wildcats spawned.

Once again, Nie Yan arrived at that open space. He soon discovered slight changes in the movement paths of the Wildcats. He had led the Wildcats near the chest before he died, and they continued to remain close by where he fell. Obtaining the silver treasure chest had just become a much more difficult task.

The Wildcats were constantly roaming about in the area. Nie Yan began studying their movement again. He could possibly brave death by drawing these Wildcats away. Then, he could resurrect, use Stealth to easily slip the past, and get to the chest afterward.

He ended Stealth. Gradually, his figure emerged about three meters away from the Wildcats.

Five Wildcats in the surrounding area simultaneously discovered him and began their pursuit.

Nie Yan made a mad dash away from the area, but his movement speed was slow compared to the Wildcats. Soon, they quickly caught up with him. One Wildcat pounced forward, causing Nie Yan to fall to the ground. The other Wildcats soon encircled him and went in for the kill.

After a flash of white light, Nie Yan once again resurrected at the cemetery in Tellak town. This time, his leg guard had dropped.

He once more set out of the town, rushing back to plunder the treasure after resurrecting. With the passage of ten minutes, Nie Yan had once again reached the open clearing.

The Wildcats were now some distance farther from the treasure chest. As he calculated their movements in his head, Nie Yan's eyes lit up. There shouldn't be any problems this time around.

Nie Yan activated Stealth and approached the silver treasure chest. He advanced for more than twenty seconds, before stopping in place after noticing two Wildcats coming up from behind. They came close to Nie Yan's location, before gradually walking away.

All the Wildcats in the area were rather far away from Nie Yan—at about a distance of approximately five meters. When he confirmed that he was finally safe, Nie Yan accelerated his pace and quickly arrived at the silver chest. Stealth still had a remaining duration of thirty-six seconds—six seconds more than he had initially anticipated.

Nie Yan crouched down to open the chest while still using Stealth—opening the chest would not cancel the skill.

「System: Opening chest... Estimated Completion: 20%... 50%...」

A Wildcat in the vicinity walked towards Nie Yan. It neared a little over two meters before eventually stopping.

Nie Yan's pulse unconsciously sped up. Calm... must remain calm... He had to constantly console himself in his head before his pulse finally calmed down.

The Wildcat glanced around for a short while, but eventually turned around and left after not detecting anything.

Nie Yan's body eased up and he let out a sigh of relief.

「System: Chest successfully opened! Time taken: 27.0 s」

Nie Yan opened the chest and began feeling around inside. When his hand came into contact with a book, his heart abruptly jumped. This is it!

Taking the book out, he looked it over.

Skill Book: Vital Strike

Skill Description: Thieves can cause additional damage by attacking an enemy's vitals.

Required: Action (requires weapon)

Skill Attribute: Hitting a target's vitals causes 5% additional damage, marking the target with a damage debuff.

Skill Cooldown: 30 s

User Restriction: Thief, Warrior, Paladin, can be learned by any faction.

Indeed this was the Vital Strike skill book. This was the best skill he was capable of learning at Level 0! This was what he had

worked so hard to obtain. After Nie Yan grabbed the book, it became a ray of white light.

Glancing at his skill bar, he noticed that another skill had appeared: Vital Strike!

Following Nie Yan's removal of the Vital Strike skill book, the silver chest began to gradually fade away before disappearing without a trace.

It's all settled! Heh... I can return to town for free too.

As Stealth's duration ended, Nie Yan's figure slowly emerged. The few Wildcats in the area immediately discovered him and attacked.

Nie Yan didn't have any experience to lose, so he was planning on dying and resurrecting in the town to avoid having to run back. Nie Yan peacefully awaited his fate.

Once again, Nie Yan died and returned to the town cemetery. This time, his novice gloves dropped. However, compared to the Vital Strike skill book, the loss was negligible. By obtaining Vital Strike, his training speed would increase greatly.

Chapter 6 – Making Preparations

Nie Yan wanted to proceed forward with the second step of his training plan. However, he required twenty coppers in order to do so!

Earning money while simultaneously training at a high speed, this is the only way to be efficient. Nie Yan thought for a moment, then began running deeper into Tellak town.

Coordinates: [309.289.221] Tellak Town, NPC: Hunter Klaus

Quest: Collect 50 Giant Silverdust Rat Skulls

Coordinates: [290.231.256] NPC: Farmer Ende

Quest: Kill 50 Giant Silverdust Rats.

Coordinates: [350.220.389] Tellak Town Outskirts, Hidden NPC: Alchemist Oer

Quest: Collect 21 Giant Silverdust Rat tails

Nie Yan found two common NPCs and three hidden NPCs that handed out quests related to killing Giant Silverdust Rats. The coordinates for the hidden NPCs were provided in a strategy guide from his previous life. Countless players had come to experience great difficulty in finding these hidden NPCs because they were unaware of these coordinates.

After he had received five quests, Nie Yan ran out of Tellak town and began heading towards the area where Giant Silverdust Rats

spawned. Giant Silverdust Rats were a species of immensely large rodents that possessed a silver ashen gray coat. Their builds slightly exceeded that of a water buffalo's, and they appeared similar to small moving hills when they roamed about. However, their movements were quite sluggish, and their attack wasn't all that high.

Giant Silverdust Rats: Level 1

Health: 100/100

The game's servers had already been up and running for a little over a week, and the vast majority of players have already reached Level 2 or 3. Hence, many of them had already moved on to hunt in higher-leveled regions. As such, only a sparse few players were still training in this Level 1 area.

Nie Yan moved quickly after discovering a Giant Silverdust Rat. He attacked, leaving several stab marks on its back.

-21

-20

-21

Three damage values appeared, floating above the Giant Silverdust Rat's head.

The Giant Silverdust Rat retaliated by turning its head to attack Nie Yan. Before it could, though, Nie Yan activated Vital Strike and

stabbed the Giant Silverdust Rat in the eye.

「System: Vital Strike successful! Attack +5%, resulting in additional damage dealt!」

-38

Another damage value floated over the Giant Silverdust Rat's head. The giant dust rat let out a miserable squeak and immediately fell to the ground.

Not bad, Vital Strike is pretty decent. Nie Yan collected the Giant Rat Skull that had been dropped as loot.

Vital Strike's cooldown was thirty seconds, giving Nie Yan just enough time to seek out another Giant Silverdust Rat.

After finding an area where Giant Silverdust Rats spawned rather quickly, Nie Yan began to idly grind monsters. Numerous Giant Silverdust Rats were constantly defeated and fell to the ground.

Nie Yan's experience bar gradually rose. 1%, 2%, 10%... after about two hours, Nie Yan had slain a little over two hundred Giant Silverdust Rats. He continued until his experience bar finally reached 15%.

Giant Rat Tails, Giant Rat Skulls, etc... All these items were gathered in a large heap. Furthermore, he had also obtained three

coppers total as loot drops.

The drop rate for money was extremely low. Only under certain circumstances would the drop rate be higher. This was in order to make Conviction's in-game currency much more valuable.

As Nie Yan's Vital Strike slew yet another giant rat, something appeared flickering under its corpse. Nie Yan's heart skipped a beat. Quickly, he bent over to pick up the item.

Tough Leather Leg Protectors (White Equipment)

Level requirement: Level 0

Properties: Defense 3-5

Weight: 3lb

User Restriction: Warrior, can be equipped by any faction.

Equipment drops in Conviction were quite rare. Only in a few relatively higher instances would the drop rate be increased. However, the level of difficulty for such instances would also be much higher. Nie Yan remembered very clearly in the past there were many players Level 10 or higher who had no choice but to equip Level 5 equipment. Simply because they couldn't find Level 10 equipment, they had to form parties and hunt monsters with lower level gear.

Since this Tough Leather Leg Protector is meant for Warriors, it'll sell for at least seven coppers if I throw it into the auction house.

He stored the Tough Leather Leg Protector into his inventory; a beginner bag had only twenty slots. Nie Yan filled his bag with so many items, there now were only eleven slots remaining.

Inside the beginner bag was a dimensional space. Items stored inside this space wouldn't raise a player's weight value.

A player's weight value was only affected by the player's equipment.

With the three coppers that had previously dropped, and by selling off the Tough Leather Leg Protector... my funds should be brought up to ten coppers. Turning in these quests should also give me a few rewards... I ought to have a little over twenty coppers by then.

Nie Yan glanced over at his bag space. The five quests he had accepted were all completed. So he started heading back to Tellak Town, as he no longer needed to hunt the Giant Silverdust Rats.

Nie Yan was doing his utmost to catch up. First, he would bridge the level gap between him and the other players. Then he would use his past life's experience to progressively expand his superiority in the game.

After returning to Tellak town, Nie Yan handed over all five quests, completing his missions. He obtained six hundred experience, which raised his experience bar to 55%. Furthermore, he had also received thirty-four coppers—an amount which exceeded his expectations. The money and experience awarded by

those three hidden NPCs were several times higher than what ordinary NPCs would've rewarded. Besides the money and experience, he also received three Basic Health Potions.

Nie Yan put the Tough Leather Leg Protector in the auction house and walked towards the weapon shop.

Upon arriving outside of the place, he saw a small narrow shop front. However, after entering, the interior space was actually quite large—roughly five by ten meters.

Weapons for every profession could be seen lined up on both the left and right sides of the wall. Common equipment for all professions could also be seen hanging from the rear wall of the shop: bows, crossbows, small daggers, etc...

The store filled to the brim with equipment was a dazzling display for the eyes.

The weapon shop's owner was a fierce looking blacksmith, appearing to be in his forties.

“The weapons I forge are the best within the whole region of the Western Prairies! Respected adventurers, may I ask what you require?” Seeing business arrive, the blacksmith came up to greet him in a lively straightforward tone.

“Bow, or crossbow.”

“Let’s see... what kind of bow or crossbow are you looking for? The equipment I have here can meet all the requirements of adventures who are Level 5 or lower.”

“Level 0, one that I can use. Attack +3 or more, and Firing Rate of 12 or more.” Nie Yan thought for a moment, and added, “The price should be within thirty coppers.”

Nie Yan originally thought collecting twenty coppers would be sufficient to purchase an ordinary bow or crossbow. He didn’t expect that he would exceed his target goal, and earn thirty-seven coppers. After the Tough Leather Leg Protector sold, his funds would surpass forty coppers. He had a complete abundance of money to splurge on a better bow or crossbow.

“I have three pieces of equipment that meet your criteria. The first is a short bow. Attack +3, Firing Rate is 13, Attack Deviation of 11%, and a Range of 20 meters. The price is seven copper coins.” The Blacksmith took out a short bow, and presented it to Nie Yan.

“Do you have anything better? Perhaps something with a higher accuracy?”

He had a task he wanted to complete. And though the short bow would suffice, having something better would save him time.

“Well, I also have this long bow. It has Attack +5, Firing Rate of 12, Deviation of 9%, and Range of 30 meters. The price is fifteen coppers.” The Blacksmith took out a long bow and presented it. Afterward, he took out an exquisite one-handed crossbow. He

loaded it with five bolts, then propped it up with his arm and aimed it around the shop. “If that doesn’t please you, then this is my finest piece of work, the one I’m most proud of. A compact crossbow with a triple-shot effect, Attack +5, Firing Rate of 8. Furthermore, as a result of its supplementary firing ability, the Firing Rate of a single shot is tested at 15. It has a deviation of 5%, and a range 30 meters. The price is twenty-eight coppers.”

“I’ll take it. Give me nine low-grade crossbow bolt quivers as well,” Nie Yan said. Each quiver contained a thousand low-grade crossbow bolts; it was definitely enough.

Nie Yan spent thirty-seven coppers to complete the transaction, leaving him without a single copper remaining. He stored the crossbow and nine quivers he had recently purchased into his bag space.

“Feel free to come again respected adventurer. I wish you a safe journey.”

In his past life, when Nie Yan had first entered the game, he believed the NPCs only possessed simple AI. He amazed at what he discovered. Afterward, he was able to keep his calm much more easily.

As Nie Yan left the weapon shop, a system notification appeared.

「System: Your Tough Leather Leg Protector has been sold for eight coppers.」

Ah, it finally sold... not bad. I now have eight coppers as my total funds. At least I won't be considered too poor right now.

Nie Yan left the boundaries of Tellak town and hurried over towards the Level 8 Bison spawn area. The Bison monsters were even more dangerous than the Wildcats. They had extremely powerful attacks, and their movement speeds were also much faster than the Wildcats. In fact, they were more than three times faster than Nie Yan with his current stats. When facing against these Bisons, there was essentially only death and no chance of survival.

Currently, there was not a single player whatsoever who dared to face off against a Level 8 monster. Even if they were currently the highest level player in the game, they still wouldn't dare.

Chapter 7 – Bypassing The Level Gap And Killing The Bison

Passing through a vast expanse of prairie land, Nie Yan, at last, arrived at a region of barrens and stone. As far as the eye could see, lofty and oddly shaped boulders were irregularly strewn throughout the area. Within this mess of boulders were narrow cracks and passageways.

It should be right here. Nie Yan surveyed the expanse for a moment. After confirming without a doubt that these were the correct coordinates, he became especially vigilant and began slowly sneaking around. This region was where Bisons actively roamed about. The whole area permeated with a sense of dread and danger. Cautiously, he squeezed himself into one of the narrow passageways within the boulders.

Coordinates [567.528.192]

The topography of this region was strange and eccentric. The narrow passageways within these boulders only allowed enough space for a single person to pass through. As he looked out after going through the narrow passageway, a dark-coloured Bison in an area at a distance of about twenty-six meters away entered his vision. Large and robust, its entire body was densely packed with muscle. Above its head, two sharp horns resembling the tips of daggers protruded out.

Bison Chief (Leader): Level 8

Health: 300/300

Nie Yan took out his crossbow and held it with his left hand. He began calibrating it, making sure the angle was just right.

By lucky coincidence, the Bison Chief was within his attacking range. Due to its body size being so massive, even if it were to discover his presence, it was still unable to traverse the narrow passageways within the mess of boulders. As a result, it was completely incapable of attacking him.

This was a typical terrain exploit!

This was an exploit his Arcane Mage friend had discovered within the game. However, at present, the only one who was aware of this terrain exploit was him!

By employing this exploit, Nie Yan could bypass the level disparity and effortlessly kill this Bison Chief!

Nie Yan began loading the crossbow with bolts. After three seconds, three crossbow bolts were completely loaded and the crossbow was cocked and ready to fire.「Wsh! Wsh! Wsh!」Three bolts were fired in rapid succession, flying in a straight line right towards the Bison Chief.

「Put! Put! Put!」The three crossbow bolts hit the Bison Chief nearly simultaneously.

Miss

-1

Miss

Three damage values floated above the Bison Chief's head. Due to the level disparity between both sides being too large, Nie Yan's attacks against the Bison Chief were weak. Most of the time it would be a miss and even if it did hit the target, it would only cause a little bit of damage.

After it had been attacked, the Bison Chief huffed out a large amount of musty air and began its mad charge towards Nie Yan's location.

「Boom!」A large crashing sound burst out. The Bison Chief had charged into the boulders and was repelled back. Its attack was unable to reach Nie Yan. It could only turn around and circle the boulders, without having any other course of action.

Nie Yan skillfully finished reloading the crossbow and like before, shot out three bolts in rapid succession towards the Bison Chief.

Although the damage was extremely low, under Nie Yan's continuous and unrelenting attacks the Bison Chief's health bar began showing signs of declining ever so slightly. However, it was awfully slow, merely falling by the smallest amount. Every now and then, it even recovered by a slight fraction.

Nie Yan's rate of fire was quite stable. After suffering his attacks,

the Bison Chief bellowed out furiously, precisely because it was incapable of even nearing Nie Yan.

Everything went as smoothly as expected. Nie Yan was attacking the Bison Chief while figuring out the next step in his leveling strategy. After being reborn, if he were like others trying to find a place to level, it would truly be an asinine waste of his time.

One must know, Nie Yan's mind possessed a vast amount of game knowledge. He followed his own reasoning and designed a perfect leveling plan.

The seconds and minutes continued to pass by. After half an hour, Nie Yan had completely used up all of the crossbow bolts within one quiver—a thousand crossbow bolts! At present, the Bison Chief still had approximately two-thirds of its health remaining.

The uninterrupted process of reloading and shooting made Nie Yan feel himself about to fall asleep. However, he still spent great effort in maintaining his high frequency of firing, so as to avoid having the Bison Chief's health recover again after he ceased his attacks.

The Bison Chief began getting somewhat weary. It continually strained for breath as it anxiously rammed against the rocks and collapsed a portion of the boulders.

Nie Yan quickly retreated inward a bit and at that moment, his menu sounded out with a voice call notification.

“Expert, I went to the coordinates you gave us for farming monsters. It is indeed very fast! I’ve already picked up two Stealth skill books from today alone!” Flying Stone said. At the location where Nie Yan told him to train, leveling was fifty percent more efficient compared to the common training areas. This had made Flying Stone really excited. Gifting Nie Yan a single Stealth Skill book had given him such a treasure trove of a training area—it was definitely a worthwhile trade!

“That’s natural of course. Fallen Shamans also drop the Owl Sight skill book. If you find any extra, don’t forget to send me one.” Nie Yan wasn’t the least bit surprised. He had gone through numerous expert strategy guides in his previous life. Small tidbits like these—the amount he remembered was definitely not few in number. In his life, Nie Yan was the type of person who was thick-skinned and furthermore very forgetful. There was an awful amount of things he would go through life forgetting or completely neglecting. However, the only things he remembered the most distinctly were definitely these game strategy guides.

Every person had an exceptional memory when dealing with the things they were particularly interested in.

“If the skill book drops, I’ll send it to you through the mail. There’s something I’ve been wondering about, how did you find out about this training spot?” Stone asked through the chat. When he had met Nie Yan, the latter had been nothing more than a Level 0.

“I used to play on a Warrior account, however, I deleted it to

create a Thief.” Nie Yan casually gave out an excuse without thinking. Naturally, he didn’t want anyone to know the secret was that he had been reincarnated.

“So it was like that... Your Warrior account must have been really high leveled, huh. Why’d you end up deleting it? In a few days, one of my friends wants to form a group to enter the Fallen Shaman camp. Expert, what are your thoughts on this?” Stone asked expectantly in his message. Nie Yan certainly did appear to be a person who was very knowledgeable. Furthermore, his several friends were indeed only able to fight to the Fallen Shaman Camp’s outer area and couldn’t advance any farther.

The Fallen Shaman Camp is a high difficulty instance. Instances are divided into special instances and basic instances. When a special instance is cleared by players, it disappears and becomes an ordinary area. As for basic instances, if they were cleared by players, they can still be repeatedly entered afterward. However, the equipment drop rate is much lower and the profits earned weren’t that high either.

The Fallen Shaman Camp is classified as a basic instance. It’s divided into five difficulties: Easy, Normal, Hard, Expert, Specialist. The higher the difficulty, the better the equipment that would drop. If a party were to clear this instance, they would have to wait five days until they could enter and clear it again.

“A full walkthrough on how to clear the Fallen Shaman Camp will cost you two silvers, no bargaining,” Nie Yan replied. Two silvers were the equivalent of two hundred coppers. Towards new players, this was definitely an extravagant sum of money.

However, since Stone's friends were able to form a team to clear the Fallen Shaman Camp, two silvers shouldn't be regarded as much.

"I'll go back and discuss it with my friend." Stone was a little skeptical. He couldn't possibly have a complete Fallen Shaman Camp walkthrough, right? Such a thing doesn't even exist online.

On an average run, profits from clearing the easy difficulty of the Fallen Shaman Camp should be about three silvers. If their luck were good, they might be able to obtain one or two high-quality drops with decent stats. Though the drop everyone wanted the most from the Fallen Shaman Camp was still the Heal skill book. Nie Yan demanding a two-silver information fee could be regarded as beyond excessive. If no equipment dropped, then they would've paid Nie Yan for nothing.

The difficulty of the Fallen Shaman Camp was a little high. After their party gets wiped out a few times, they'll naturally realize the fee Nie Yan had commissioned wasn't the least bit expensive at all.

"Reply to me after your friend agrees. If he doesn't agree, don't bother me unless you have business." Nie Yan continued shooting at his target. Under his constant rain of fire, the Bison Chief gradually began showing indications of falling.

"Alright, I'll go and talk with our party leader." There was basically an equal sign connecting Nie Yan to the title of an expert. He wasn't slightest bit offended in regards to Nie Yan's cold attitude. Experts who have this kind of personality were also pretty common. Stone was wondering, What level did Nirvana

Flame's previous warrior account reach? It ought to have been really powerful, but why did he end up deleting it? Could it have possibly been related to a matter that was difficult to discuss?

Flying Stone finished speaking.「Doot! Doot! Doot! ...」A busy signal came from the voice chat.

Nie Yan hung up and accelerated the firing rate of the crossbow in his hand. One after another, arrows continued to rapidly leave the crossbow and shoot out.

Firing for one and a half hours, he had consumed around thirty-six hundred crossbow bolts.「Mooo!」At long last, the Bison Chief let out a final agonizing cry before staggering to the ground. The massive body smashed heavily towards the earth, and Nie Yan could even feel the vibrations under his feet.

Nie Yan estimated a bit: if he had used the short bow, killing the Bison Chief would have taken at least five hours in addition to consuming over ten thousand arrows. Fortunately, this single-handed crossbow with its additional skill saved him quite a bit of time.

Two white lights shone upon Nie Yan's body as two clear and melodious tunes sounded out—each one represented a single level up.

「System: You've successfully slain a Bison Chief. +1800% experience for killing a monster above your level. You have received 8290 experience points.」

Nie Yan glanced at his experience bar, he had reached Level 2 with 21% of his experience bar already filled. The experience gained from killing the Bison Chief was definitely enormous.

After finally completing his task, Nie Yan put away the crossbow in his hand and walked over towards the Bison Chief's corpse. Searching under the Bison Chief's dead body, he found that it dropped five coppers. In addition, he also managed to pick up a dagger.

Nie Yan glanced at the dagger's stats.

Horn Dagger: Bronze

Properties: Unidentified

Nie Yan's eyelids jumped up in excitement. It was a Bronze-grade dagger! Equipment was divided in these grades: White, Bronze, Silver, Gold, Dark Gold, and Legendary. Occasionally there would also be green-coloured sets. Only equipment at Bronze Grade or above had additional properties.

The monsters within Conviction are classified into these rarities: Leaders, Sub Elites, Elites, and Lords. These monsters were uncommon and very few in number as well as spawning infrequently. Equipment with additional properties only had a one in one thousand chance of dropping. The majority of players could only make do by wearing white-grade equipment. Due to this, equipment with additional properties were all fairly precious, and their prices would skyrocket to the extent that they were

unbearable for ordinary players.

Bronze grade weapons normally had additional 20% attack above that of ordinary weapons. Furthermore, they also came with additional properties.

The equipment that a Level 8 Bison Chief drops should be Level 5. At present, the price of a Level 5 bronze grade dagger is at least three silvers or higher. Furthermore, an average Level 3 player's total assets, for the most part, was only about twenty coppers. If one had assets valued at the level of silvers, they were definitely a very well-off person.

According to his plans, he gathered the Bison Chief's drops and stored away the bronze grade dagger into his bag space. Nie Yan retreated from the narrow passageways within the boulders and headed back towards Tellak town.

Tellak town's only appraiser was a short-statured white-bearded old man with narrow triangular eyes. He was very shrewd, making everyone who saw him feel very unnerved. However, he was the only appraiser in all of Tellak town.

Nie Yan opened the trading window.

"Youngster, do you need me to appraise any items?" the short old man asked.

"A dagger." Nie Yan put up the Horn Dagger into the appraisal

window.

“The appraisal fee is ten coppers. Do you still wish for an appraisal?”

Nie Yan’s heart skipped a beat. This Horn Dagger’s appraisal fee was ten coppers. Typically, the appraisal fee for an item was five percent of the item’s price, and this was only the NPC’s price for the item. The market price was frequently more than six times higher than that. In other words, this Horn dagger had a value of at least twelve silvers!

He thought for a moment. In the next few days, I won’t be needing to go anywhere that requires a lot of money. Spending ten coppers also won’t be that troublesome. He pressed confirm.

The Horn Dagger blossomed with a cyan radiance; its brilliance was definitely not understated. This radiance was a distinctive characteristic of bronze grade equipment.

The Horn Dagger’s handle was cambered with the texture of wood, with an awfully sharp blade in the front. It was much thicker compared to ordinary daggers and possessed the unique characteristic of being shaped like a bull’s horn.

Horn Dagger (Bronze)

Level Requirement: Level 5

Properties: Attack 16–19, Strength +5

Attack Speed: 2.3

Weight: 1 lb

User Restriction: Thief, can be equipped by any faction.

This Horn Dagger gave a bonus to his Strength stat. These five points in Strength were equivalent to five points of attack. Then add onto the fact that the dagger's base attack was already higher than an ordinary Level 5 dagger's by three or four points, it meant this Horn Dagger was better than an ordinary dagger by nearly ten points. The influence of these ten points of attack, speaking from a new player's perspective, was indeed very large.

Looks like I've picked up a reliable Level 5 dagger, Nie Yan thought.

Chapter 8 – The Price Of Underestimation

After finishing the appraisal of the dagger, Nie Yan had begun to walk outside. Lowering his head, he took a glance at his skill bar. There were only two skills there: Stealth, and Vital Strike.

A perfect Thief should have numerous skills piled up at their disposal. A Thief could make do without equipment; however, they absolutely could not do without skills.

Of the several areas where Thief skill books could be farmed in the beginning stages of the game, Nie Yan knew all of them like the back of his hand. However, he would be unlikely to take the great effort and pain of farming them out. If a skill book could be farmed out, then it could also easily be bought in the marketplace.

Hmm... were there any other places where I could find rare beginner skill books?

Nie Yan smacked his forehead. How did I manage to forget that?

With regards to professions such as a Thieves, if they wanted to possess sustainable fighting strength they would often select either Alchemy Crafting or the Bandage skill. Alchemy Crafting allowed a player to manufacture every kind of health potion, drug, etc... In the middle of a battle, a health potion—that could instantly restore lost health—was tantamount to a second life for a player. Afterwards when a battle was over, drinking a recovery potion allowed a player to quickly restore their health and throw themselves back into combat again. Thus, accelerating their

training speed as well. As for the Bandaging skill, in comparison to a health potion, it was a bit lacking—the common Bandage skill could not be used during a skirmish.

Nie Yan knew of a location where a rare skill, Combat Medic, could be learned. Unlike Bandage, it could be used while in combat.

At higher levels, if a person wished to purchase middle-or higher-tiered health or recovery potions from the marketplace, their expenditure would be quite large. After all, their prices were quite costly—for most players, health and recovery potions were items they could only acquire by digging through the gaps between their teeth. Unless one were rich, the average player wouldn't be seen commonly using health, or recovery, potions.

However, Nie Yan was different—his head was filled with many ways to earn money quickly and easily. He didn't need to worry about money. Later on, health and recovery potions were all things he could easily buy from the marketplace. Thus, it wasn't necessary for him to waste his time learning Alchemy Crafting. However, if he learned this Combat Medic skill, it would greatly enhance his survivability. Thinking to this, Nie Yan suddenly had an idea.

I'll put that off for later. I should learn the Combat Medic skill first.

Nie Yan spent two coppers and bought two Basic Underwater Breathing Pills from the NPC general store. Right after, he rushed towards Lake Rando which wasn't too far of a distance from Tellak

town.

After passing through several Level 2–3 areas, he had met many players that had formed parties to hunt monsters. They often occupied a single region in their own area. Warriors, Paladins, etc... all these close combat professions worked to draw monsters. Right afterwards, the Mage would unleash an unceasing barrage of spells towards these monsters. Some parties would even bring their own priest. Most priests didn't currently have the Heal skill—their ability to deal damage wasn't as good as Mages either. For the most part, they were dirty experience leeches. Despite this, every team still looked for a priest as if they were a hot commodity. This was because if a team wanted to have any growth or development in the future, they absolutely needed to have a good relationship with their priest. Lacking a priest was the same as lacking an endless supply of health potions.

As for Thieves, in the early stages of the game, many Thieves would be easily dumped by their team. However, Thieves were quite famous for their solo training speed. As long as they purchased all of the necessary skills they required, a Thief's training speed would not be inferior to a Mage's in any aspect. So, it wouldn't be much of a loss if they couldn't join a team.

Level training in the various monster spawn areas was awfully monotonous and boring. However, these players could still chat with each other. Thus, the time would pass quite quickly when they chatted on idly.

Nie Yan carefully passed through these areas where players were training because a lot of struggles would occur between players for

certain training spots. If a player killed other players, they would receive a penalty with their names marked red. They would be barred from entering city walls as well. Having their names marked red meant other players could kill them without fear of recourse. Their loss of levels upon death would be even harsher, and every single piece of equipment would drop as well. Though, if that player killed monsters for a certain period of time, the red marking on their name would eventually disappear. Despite this, many players would still frequently take this risk for the sake of stealing another player's equipment. Not hesitating in the slightest, they would kill others for their equipment, regardless of having their name marked red. In order to do this safely, they would often target strangers in the wilderness far away from any city. Thus, one must be very cautious when travelling alone.

Lake Rando... this area was inhabited by Fishmen monsters. According to rumours, these Fishmen were the descendants of the ancient Wicked Naga. After countless generations, they finally developed into their current form. [They possessed the body of a fish, and four limbs just like a human.](#) The weapons they employed for attacks were their sharp teeth and the tridents they held in their hands.

Fishmen were Level 3 monsters that heavily populated the area with their massive numbers. Furthermore, there was even a Fishmen village within the vicinity. It was necessary for Nie Yan to pass through the borders of the village to enter Lake Rando. Afterwards, he would need to swim through the lake to arrive at his destination.

Situated by the lakeside of Lake Rando was the Fishmen village with its several hundred wooden huts scattered sporadically by the

sandy edges of the lakeshore. This Fishmen village contained at least three hundred or so Fishmen, several tens of Fishmen Leaders, and two Elite Fishmen. If one wanted to clear this area, they'd need at least a thousand players or more.

Just as Nie Yan was preparing to use Stealth to bypass the Fishmen village, a system announcement rang out.

Local Announcement: The Guild, Victorious Return, is planning to clear this location in three minutes. All players within the vicinity of the Fishmen Village, please depart immediately.

Victorious Return? Nie Yan raised his eyebrow. In his previous life, he and the guild Victorious Return had a few run-ins and festivities together... Victorious Return's people ran rampant and acted arrogantly. They'd clear the path and kill everyone in it whenever they wanted to. A long time ago, one of Nie Yan's brothers killed three members from Victorious Return because he was discontent from the guild forcing him out of a training area. A bit of a grudge was pillared down with those from the Victorious Return, and all of the guilds went chasing after him. They threatened to have his brother slaughtered back to Level 0. Nie Yan's and the others' strength was still pretty weak back then, thus he could only hide deeply in the ravines of the mountain. He continued to level up and trained like a madman for over a month. Only when he felt his level had reached high enough did he dare to come out. Even then, he was still barely able to defend himself. In the end, he never dared to have a direct open confrontation with a big guild like Victorious Return.

The feeling of powerlessness back then... don't even bring it up.

In this life, that sort of history absolutely won't repeat itself. This debt would definitely be one that I'll have repaid in full. However, it won't be today, for now...

Nie Yan had just entered the game for less than a day. He still needed to gradually accumulate his wealth bit by bit.

Immediately, he turned and ran towards the lakeside.

As he looked ahead of him, he saw the clear waters merging with the reflection of the azure sky. The lake gleamed and sparkled as the sun's rays illuminated the top of the crystalline clear waters.

Victorious Return's players had mobilized intensely and were surveying the area. There were many areas in the vicinity where one could discover the movements of Victorious Return's people. They definitely did not come with few numbers. It appeared that they were preparing to begin their operation on the Fishmen village.

The Fishmen village wasn't an instance, but rather a spawning ground for monsters to congregate. These types of places would also frequently drop decent items.

Nie Yan passed through a small grove of trees, arriving at about two hundred meters away from the lakeside.

Suddenly, a ball of fire streaked through the sky, launching

towards Nie Yan's location.

As the ball of fire flashed, Nie Yan's line of sight shifted past the grove of trees. His eyes fell upon the body of an Elementalist wearing a red robe. The opposing player was a Level 3 Elementalist from Victorious Return!

Mages were divided into three types of classes: Elementalists, Arcane Mages, and Holy Mages. Elementalists had the ability to control ice, fire, and lightning—their power was the elements. Arcane Mages were able to control arcane might and finally, there were the Holy Mages. They were the least selected profession. Their skills were the most difficult to train in, however their power was definitely the strongest. They could cast and unleash the power of divine spells.

The killing power of fire spells was the highest among the spells at an Elementalist's disposal.

By the time Nie Yan had noticed the fireball, it was already too late.

「Boom!」The fireball exploded on Nie Yan's body. It tore through Nie Yan's health, as his health bar plummeted by twenty-two points.

「System: The opposing player Violet Flame has attacked you. You are free to retaliate in legitimate self-defense. Time: 3 minutes.」

When coming across a Mage, you either run up to them and engage them in close quarters combat or hurriedly ran away.

After confirming there were no other players from Victorious Return nearby, Nie Yan dashed towards the Elementalist named Violet Flame.

A Mage's strategy was to maintain as great of a distance from the enemy as possible and bombard them with magic spells.

The Elementalist Violet Flame leapt back using the spell Flame Burst and cast Fireball once again. Afterwards, he turned around and fled in an attempt to gain some distance from Nie Yan.

When facing incoming magic in a fight, players were usually able to dodge the spell by rolling. However, if they dodged the spell by rolling, they would undoubtedly give the opposing Elementalist the opportunity to gain some distance. Nie Yan directly confronted the Elementalist's fireball and continued to charge forward.

「Boom!」The fireball exploded on Nie Yan's body, causing him to lose twenty-seven points of health.

Each time Violet Flame cast a spell, there would be a delay in the casting of the spell.

There were some essential factors in casting magic. Gestures, language, material, and magical tools were all required in casting different types of magic. The requirements for casting different

spell were distinct. Some only required for you to perform a chant to cast the spell. Some required gestures and others required chants, gestures, and materials—all of these components at once in order to cast a spell.

Every spell had different requirements in order to be cast, and the casting time would vary as well.

Casting a spell used syllables and gestures as units—one syllable per second and one gesture per second. Ten syllables formed into a set of syllables and ten gestures formed into a set of gestures. Syllables and gestures could also be layered over each other—meaning they could both be done at the same time.

The casting time for the Flame Burst spell was two syllables and two gestures for a total of two seconds. If they hadn't learnt a movement skill when casting the Flame Burst spell they would need to stay still for two seconds.

Nie Yan took advantage of the time Violet Flame used to cast Flame Burst to press forward. Quickly, with a forward stab, he shaved off twenty-three points of health from Violet Flame. A Mage's defense was extraordinarily fragile.

Violet Flame leapt backwards. Promptly, he cast Fierce Flame Ring. Four separate flames appeared launching towards Nie Yan.

Fierce Flame Ring only required one syllable in order to cast.

At such a close distance, Nie Yan was simply unable to evade it. Thus, he could only suffer through, receiving thirty-nine points in damage. With a flick of his finger, he took out the Basic Health Potion from his belt and downed it.

Violet Flame's actions could be regarded as standard for a Mage. However, his movements were quite rigid and clumsy. Every Mage would tense up when a Thief neared them in close proximity.

As the Fierce Flame Ring was flying through the air, Violet Flame took the opportunity to draw back.

Nie Yan added many points into Dexterity. In terms of speed, Thieves were still quite remarkable. This time around, his speed gained him an advantage as he continuously wrapped around Violet Flame. He lunged out with two consecutive stabs causing Violet Flame to lose thirty-six points of health.

Once more, Violet Flame cast another fireball towards Nie Yan.

Conviction's combat system counted three seconds per round, and any magical spell that took less than three seconds to chant would be uninterruptible unless the caster died. Even though it was a close combat battle, Violet Flame would still be able to counter-attack Nie Yan.

Under Fireball's high damage, Nie Yan was left with twenty-five health remaining. Violet Flame wanted to retreat back to pull some distance. Brandishing his staff, he began reciting another spell incantation. The fire elements rapidly began moving towards his

staff and coalescing into a round mass.

It appeared Violet Flame still had fifty-one health remaining. For the time being, he was safe because Nie Yan merely had twenty-five health remaining. As long as he casts another Fireball he could finish off Nie Yan.

Following Violet Flame's chanting, the fire elements rapidly gathered together as it raged and blazed forward.

"Drop dead!" Violet Flame felt everything was now within his control—the flames from his staff illuminated the sinister expression on his face.

Nie Yan was well aware of how dangerous his current situation was. He had already forced his way to Violet Flame's side. Glancing at his rage bar, he noticed it was fully charged and matched the requirements for an enhanced attack.

Nie Yan's deep black pupils locked onto Violet Flame's throat. Quickly, he maneuvered the dagger in his hand into a reverse grip.

"Vital Strike!"

Nie Yan's and Violet Flame's body crossed paths. A streak of cold glint flashed past Violet Flame's throat. A deep cut appeared on his throat as it split open with blood gushing forth.

「System: Vital Strike successful! Attack +5%, causing additional

damage!」

-51

A damage value floated atop Violet Flame's head.

A complete turnaround!

How is this possible?

His eyes were deeply permeated with an unfathomable sort of expression.

Never underestimate the explosive power of a Thief. When facing a Thief, never feel that you're safe or secure, even if you occupy an absolute advantage... because in the very next moment, the one who ends up dead could very well be you.

The light in Violet Flame's eyes gradually faded.「Plop...」He collapsed on the ground, still unable to understand what had happened. How could a single Thief just suddenly burst out with so much damage...?

Vital Strike... this skill's damage is pretty good, Nie Yan thought.

Nie Yan put away his dagger, then bent down to look through Violet Flame's corpse. Soon, he retrieved a dropped equipment and

picked up a Level 0 Intelligence +3 Bronze Staff. He estimated he could sell it for around ten or so coppers.

“There’s an enemy over there! Violet Flame was killed!”

“Chase! Don’t let him escape!”

Nie Yan had killed a member from Victorious Return. Such a large event was certain to attract the attention of everyone within the surrounding area. Six members from Victorious Return came from every direction and quickly rushed towards Nie Yan’s location in an attempt to surround him.

Seeing this, Nie Yan made a mad dash towards Lake Rando. His running speed was quicker than most of the average players at his level. Soon, he rapidly gained some distance between him and the other players.

Though, a Swordsman appeared right ahead of Nie Yan, barring his way forward.

“You want to run? It’s not going to be that easy! Linear Slash!”

Chapter 9 – Fishmen

The Berserker jumped high into the air. Borrowing the force of gravity, he sent his sword cleaving towards Nie Yan.

By the time Nie Yan saw the Berserker's Bastard Sword whistling through the wind, it had already neared his forehead.

Nie Yan leaned his body to the side as the sword brushed past.

Within Conviction, long range attacks would automatically lock onto their target—who could only roll to dodge. As for melee combat, one could sidestep to avoid certain attacks.

The most important requirement while sidestepping to dodge head-on attacks was to have good reaction speed. The timing had to be extremely precise. In his previous life, Nie Yan had already trained this ability to an extremely proficient level. After he dodged the Berserker's attack, he made a mad dash towards the lake.

As his sword slashed through empty space, the Berserker stared out blankly with a look of shock. That guy's reaction speed is quick, being able to even dodge an attack like that...

By the time he turned his head, the Berserker had discovered that Nie Yan had already run out a far distance. Seeing this, he held his sword out and gave chase.

“Third Brother, what’s going on with you? You can’t even stop a single person from running away!” To his side, a Fighter came running over and voiced out his complaints.

“That Thief’s movements were too quick. I wasn’t able to stop him at all!”

The Fighter quickly glanced over at Elementalist Zi Huo’s (Violet Flame’s) corpse. Zi Huo was an extremely reclusive fellow, however, his skills were definitely not weak. Yet he still died by the hands of that Thief. Looking back, it appeared that the Thief was not as simple as he first appeared.

“Everyone! Gather up and bar his way forward!”

Both the Fighter and Berserker accelerated their pace.

As he drew increasingly closer to the lake’s surface—at about five or six meters away—Nie Yan fished out the Basic Underwater Breathing Pill he had bought prior and popped it into his mouth.

“He wants to dive into the lake to escape!”

“Don’t let him get to the water!”

In a moment of mutual understanding, both the Berserker and Fighter simultaneously leapt forward. The Fighter and Berserker were both professions of the Warrior class. Their attacks after borrowing the momentum of their leaps were much more fierce

and quick compared to other melee professions.

“Sudden Assault!”

“Flame Slash!”

The Fighter brandished his sword and charged forward, quickly advancing towards Nie Yan.

As the Berserker cleaved downwards, his sword ignited and became enveloped in raging flames.

Nie Yan and the two were still a bit of a distance apart. As he turned his head to look back at them, he immediately felt his face assaulted by the flames of the sword stroke. Suddenly, from the corners of his mouth, he revealed a strange smile and then leapt backwards... His back entered the waters first, as he plunged deeply into Lake Rando.

Right after, concentric ripples began slowly dispersing through the surface of the tranquil lake waters.

The Fighter and Berserker rushed over, finally stopping at the lakeside. The Berserker prepared to jump into the lake waters, but the Fighter pulled him back and stopped him. “Forget it... there’s no need to chase after a cornered enemy. Besides, none of us have any Underwater Breathing Pills.” The Fighter thought back to the strange smile Nie Yan had shown just moment prior. This was the root cause of his unwillingness to enter the lake’s waters—for fear

that Nie Yan could possibly have some sort of malicious plan for them in the waters below. Ultimately, he was fearful that it would cause them to be left buried under the lakebed.

“Forget it... just like that?” the Berserker replied in an extremely depressed tone.

“Just consider it Zi Huo’s bad luck. Who let him think he was so invincible that he could just separate himself from the team like that? Anyway, we’ll let this be a lesson for him—there are still many experts besides him.”

Several players from Victorious Return ran up to them breathlessly, most of whom were Mages, Priests, and so on. Their movement speeds weren’t as quick compared to the Warriors. Hence, they were left far behind.

“How’d it go? Where’d that guy run off to?” one of the Mages asked.

The Fighter shook his head and replied, “We didn’t catch him. He ended up diving into the lake.”

That Mage had an astonished expression as he gazed at the Fighter and Berserker. These two, Zi Yan (Violet Cliff) and Zi Ming (Violet Underworld), could be considered the top two Warriors within the guild. First, that Thief killed Zi Huo, and then he managed to escape even after being surrounded by Zi Yan and Zi Ming... Where the hell did that Thief come from?

“I wonder... what was that Thief’s name? Go ask Zi Huo. He should have already revived at the graveyard.” The Mage spoke in a curious tone.

“Zi Huo just said the Thief’s name is Nirvana Flame,” Zi Ming replied and firmly kept this name within his mind.

In a concerned tone, the Mage commanded, “From now on, have the people under you stay cautious. If they encounter this Nirvana Flame, have them report back immediately.” When the several of them came across Nie Yan, they were unable to gain any sort of advantage. As for the outcome, if ordinary members of the guild were to encounter him, one could well imagine the consequences.

After Nie Yan dived into the lake, he began swimming about. The waters of Lake Rando were extraordinarily clear. The sun’s rays penetrated through the water. As the light refracted through the water’s surface, it formed brightly coloured pillars. The lake’s vegetation drifted about gently—slowly dancing with the waves. It formed an exceptionally beautiful and mesmerizing piece of scenery.

As Nie Yan was submerged near the lake floor, shuttling himself between the lake’s vegetation, he suddenly recalled that there was another chest within Lake Rando’s waters as well. However, he was a little unsure of its exact location as his memory was still a bit hazy.

It should definitely be near this area. That chest should contain the skill book of a supportive skill called Gatherer. Even though Gatherer is not some kind of rare skill book, it’s still pretty scarce,

considering the average level of the current player-base. After a player learned the Gatherer skill, they could increase their income by quite a bit. Every team required at least one member to have this skill, and every solo player definitely required the Gatherer skill as well. The market demand for the skill book was huge, however, the supply was few. This caused the relationship between supply and demand to become unbalanced. In turn, it caused the price of the Gatherer skill book to soar to great heights.

If I'm able to find the treasure chest, it would be very good. One of the characteristics of Thieves is that they're able to reach many locations that other professions would be incapable of reaching. By acquiring the Gatherer skill I can make it display even more of its usefulness.

Basic Underwater Breathing Pills can only last for fifteen minutes. If I had known earlier that I was going to be underwater searching for a treasure chest, I would've definitely bought a few more. Nie Yan felt a considerable bit of regret.

In the far distance, a figure slowly submerged itself into the water and began swimming over. After being illuminated by the sun's rays. Nie Yan could, at last, see the figure distinctly. It was indeed a Level 3 Fishman. It had the body of a fish, its four limbs continuously moving to and fro. The speed of its movement underwater was unusually quick. In addition, it held a trident which was grasped firmly in its hand.

Nie Yan hurriedly concealed himself within the thickets of the underwater vegetation.

If it were one versus one, Nie Yan could effortlessly kill this Fishman. However, Fishmen very much loathed fighting one on one. In a situation where they were attacked, they would produce a howl so intense that it draws all the Fishmen within the immediate vicinity over to its location.

For the purpose of staying safe, Nie Yan definitely did not dare to provoke these troublesome fellows.

The Fishman was in an area not far from Nie Yan and was swimming over. Pushing apart the underwater vegetation, it made its way through.

While the Fishman was brushing past the underwater plants, Nie Yan's eyes peered through the thickets of vegetation, discovering an object faintly concealed within.

Glancing at the Fishman who had swum a far distance away, Nie Yan carefully swam past. This was an area heavily surrounded by Fishmen activity. If he were discovered, it would become dangerous very quickly.

Nie Yan brushed past the vegetation. After searching for a while, he finally found a small wooden crate within the vegetation. It was the lowest level of treasure chests—White grade. However, he was unsure if it was the one from his memories that he was looking for.

After opening the wooden crate, Nie Yan went about digging through it. Surprisingly, the sensation he felt in his hands when he touched the object in the chest wasn't that of a skill book, but

rather that of a smooth pearl.

Nie Yan examined this object's properties.

Murloc Water Aversion Pearl: Special Item

Additional effect: Allows the user to breathe underwater. Once activated, allows the user to breathe underwater for thirty minutes.

Cooldown: Twelve Hours.

It was the most basic of special items. Although the item wasn't anything particularly great, it would allow Nie Yan to save on a few Basic Underwater Breathing pills. So, he would still be able to use them in the future.

It seems this place doesn't contain only a single chest. After thinking about it, it should be right. Within such a large lake, the developers definitely wouldn't place only a single treasure chest. Nie Yan continued his search through the thick plant growth, traveling back and forth. After finding the Water Aversion Pearl, he spent quite an ample amount of time searching for treasure chests underwater.

There were some movements in one of the thickets not far from him, causing Nie Yan's heart to jump with fright. Hurriedly, he ducked into the undergrowth next to him and concealed himself.

A single Fishman appeared swimming through the vegetation, not far from Nie Yan. It leisurely swam past the gaps between the

aquatic plant life.

In the next moment, another Fishman came swimming towards Nie Yan's location.

A single Fishman appeared swimming through the vegetation. Not far from Nie Yan, it leisurely swam past the gaps between the aquatic plant life.

In the next moment, another Fishman came swimming towards Nie Yan's location.

[Then another Fishman appeared and another one...](#)

The Fishmen were appearing with increasing frequency.

Dammit, did I end up stumbling upon a Fishmen lair...? Or maybe it's just my luck that I ended up coming across a school of Fishmen swimming by.

One of the Fishmen neared him; the distance between them became increasingly shorter. Nie Yan felt a lump in his throat—his mind full of anxiousness and urgency. He firmly grasped onto the dagger in his hand. Hiding seems like it's going to be impossible now. I can only hope for an opportunity to escape. Only, my swimming speed can't be compared to that of a Fishmen. I'm not confident that I can really escape...

The number of Fishmen within the vicinity were simply too

many. If all of them came over, the only path Nie Yan would have left to take was death.

If I were to blame someone I can only blame myself for getting too greedy. For the sake of finding treasure, I completely forgot about the dangers.

One of the Fishmen arrived in the area about three meters away from him. It seemed to have noticed something. Halting in place, it raised up the trident in its hand.

「Kieeh! Croak!」The Fishmen opened its mouth and produced a bizarre call.

Nie Yan gazed at his surroundings. At least ten or so Fishmen emerged, surrounding the area he had hidden himself in. The Trident, which was as bright as snow, had already completely sealed off his escape route.

He was finished. There was no way he could beat these Fishmen. The speed at which they moved underwater was unusually quick. Furthermore, once their sharp teeth bit into their target, they wouldn't release their jaws until they tore their target to shreds.

Escaping is absolutely impossible. It's also impossible to win, even if I try forcefully facing off against them.

In his mind, Nie Yan was prepared to die. He quickly glanced at the body of the Fishmen directly opposite of him. They had a soft

red patch surrounding their abdomens—that area was their weak spot. Even if I die, I'll at least take one out with me!

Just at that moment, the intense sound of a horn rang out from the distant direction of the lakeside. The quick tempo was filled with urgency, as the loud and clear sound continuously resonated into the far distance.

This was the warning signal. The Fishmen tribe was being attacked!

The ten or so surrounding Fishmen near Nie Yan all stopped their movements at the same time.「Gurgle, Croak!」Shifting their heads to listen carefully, they opened their mouths and spoke in a strange language. Right after, they all simultaneously swam towards the direction of the lakeside at a great speed.

These ten Fishmen swam away, becoming increasingly distant. Over a hundred Fishmen rushed over from all directions, converging together towards a single point as if they were a shoal of fish.

The Fishmen gradually disappeared from Nie Yan's view.

Nie Yan still felt apprehension in his heart. By some stroke of luck, the outcome of those subsequent events was surprising. However, they were still within his expectations.

Chapter 10 – Physician Blevins

Nie Yan glanced in the direction of the Lakeside. It seems they've already started.

The Fishmen tribe was suffering an attack by the Victorious Return guild. This was why the encircling Fishmen had abandoned their attack and returned to aid their tribe. I never thought Victorious Return's people would end up saving my life. Haha, this world is so wonderfully strange!

After all the Fishmen had swum away, the surrounding vicinity was now completely safe. Hence, Nie Yan stepped up his search for nearby treasure chests. Eventually, he noticed another treasure chest hidden within the thick underwater vegetation. It was a white treasure chest, just like the last.

The surrounding landscape... everything here coincides with the one in my memories. This is the location!

Nie Yan opened the chest. Digging through it, he felt a skill book make contact with his hands. It was the Gatherer skill book! As he held it in his hands, it turned into a streak of white light. The skill bar for supportive abilities had another skill appear—Gatherer!

Pretty decent harvest... However, I don't know if there are any other treasure chests within this area. It would simply be a waste of time to keep searching. It doesn't matter; I still know many other locations where I can find treasure chests. When I level up a bit, I can go pick them up at any time.

Nie Yan swam, shuttling back and forth between the aquatic plants. If he encountered a monster, he would avoid them by staying a far distance away. After about ten minutes of swimming, he noticed a single island in the middle of Lake Rando. Only after noticing this did he swim towards the surface.

「System: You've discovered an island within the center of the lake.」

Reaching the shore, Nie Yan checked his coordinates. As he was investigating the surrounding area, he discovered a person sitting in the far distance—fishing by the shore.

This NPC was a very odd old man. He would make a request to every single player who encountered him to retrieve Fine Silk. For every bundle of Fine Silk that was brought back, the player would receive one Silk Cloth.

If Fine Silk was sold to an NPC, it would amount to three coppers. However, Silk Cloth could only be sold for two coppers. If one continued on like this, there would be a loss in profit. Even after continuously exchanging with him, this Old Man would still do absolutely nothing to compensate the player.

There were many players who would complete this task. However, every one of them would continue to receive losses—never to receive a reward of any sort.

Nie Yan also did this task in his previous life. Only after

delivering five Fine Silk did he finally give up accepting this quest. Exchanging Fine Silk for Silk Cloth was truly a waste of money.

Sometime later, a person who did not believe he would continue to receive nothing, repeatedly accepted the quest. Only after delivering thirty Fine Silk did he finally receive a reward. This NPC would impart onto the player the Combat Medic skill—not only this, but it would be at the Intermediate level as well. After this information came out, it caused an uproar among the player-base. One after another, they would continuously rush over to accept the quest. However by that time, the NPC had already left.

Currently in the area where Nie Yan was located, there were Level 3 monsters known as Water Spiders that dropped Fine Silk. Obtaining thirty Fine Silk would probably require about three days of continuous grinding. It just so happened that he could farm these thirty pieces of Fine Silk while also leveling up. Exchanging thirty Fine Silk for thirty Silk Cloth was merely a loss of thirty coppers, nothing more. Compared to an Intermediate Combat Medic skill, it was truly a negligible amount.

Nie Yan walked over to the Old Man.

The strange Old Man muttered loudly to himself, “Around this time of year, the Hilton Stronghold would be besieged by the devil creatures that arise from the remote underground. There are numerous warriors who defend the stronghold. For the sake of safeguarding this lush and prosperous land, they pay with their blood and lives. The wounded suffer in anguish every day and night. To them, yesterday is the same as tomorrow and tomorrow is the same as yesterday.”

He turned his head towards Nie Yan and asked, “Youngster, now tell me—would it better if I fished here on the shore, or would it be better if I fished while on the waters?”

The Old Man had grey hair and appeared somewhat senile with his age. Numerous wrinkles were spread across his face. As if withered, his skin looked similar to tree bark. Sagging like the folds of his skin, his ashen-grey cloak hung low by his fishing rod.

From his impression, Nie Yan’s felt this NPC was a funny muddle-headed old man. He always asked a series of strange and odd questions, and it was fine as long as you somewhat answered them. However at present, when Nie Yan heard the Old Man’s words, “Yesterday is the same as tomorrow. Tomorrow is also the same as yesterday,” they had a new type of meaning.

This Old Man wasn’t an old fool. Rather, he was actually quite wise!

It was fine if you answered the question in whichever way you liked. However, as if goaded on by some supernatural force, Nie Yan answered, “As long as you’re able to catch fish, shore or water, what difference does it make?”

Hearing Nie Yan’s answer, the Old Man’s eyes flashed with a strange glint.

Noticing the change in the Old Man’s expression as it fell upon his eyes, Nie Yan became increasingly convinced—this Old Man in

front of him definitely wasn't simple.

“Time is akin to an illusion and moves like a pendulum. The months and years are wasted doing nothing and suffering eternally repeats. In the end, everything returns to dust. Even if those brave warriors are able to defend this vast great world, they won't be able to escape the pain of illness and the Reaper of Death. In the end, what meaning is there to life?” the Old Man sighed.

“The meaning of life is to stubbornly prevail—to live without regrets,” Nie Yan said, while deep in contemplation. These were the insights he had gained this life after living through his previous one. He continued replying to the Old Man's question. “All their loved ones, their fellow brothers... all of them are here alongside them in this vast world. They continue to resist the attacks of their enemies for the sake of bringing them happiness. They stake their lives in order to defend this conviction. That is their honor and that is their glory. In doing so, the God of Light will protect them.”

Nie Yan speculated that this Old Man was very likely one of the NPCs from the Hilton Stronghold, who left and journeyed outside in search of Fine Silk.

Listening to Nie Yan's words, the muddled expression in the Old Man's eyes became clear.

“Young man, I need a lot of Fine Silk. Is it possible for you to help me obtain it?” the Old Man asked.

“It’s my desire to help in any way I can,” Nie Yan happily replied. These were the exact words he had waited for.

「System: You’ve received a task. Physician Blevins has entrusted you the task of retrieving Fine Silk.」

Nie Yan began to recall. In his previous life, he had simply answered all these questions without much thought. The task he ended up receiving was “Nameless Old Man’s Request.” It seems the name of this current quest and the one he had received in the past weren’t exactly the same.

This Old Man ought to be the NPC physician in the Hilton Stronghold... Did he come all the way from the Hilton Stronghold for the sake of finding Fine Silk?

The fact that this Old Man also taught the Intermediate Combat Medic skill further confirmed Nie Yan’s suspicions.

All of that doesn’t matter right now. First, I’ll finish this quest and think about it later.

Nie Yan bid farewell to the Old Man and headed south of the small island. That region of the lake was an area where Water Spiders roamed about. Although Water Spiders were Level 3 monsters, their combat strength wasn’t that great. Only when they were on the water’s surface would they become somewhat of a problem.

Once more, Nie Yan plunged into the lake, then stuck his head out of the water. This region of underwater space didn't have a lot of monster activity. Thus, he didn't have to worry about any monsters launching a sneak attack from below.

Soon, he discovered a Water Spider. They were a species of spider that grew to a very large size. They were capable of moving about at high speeds on the water's surface. Unlike other spiders, they didn't use venom to attack. Furthermore, they were even afraid of humans. As long as a player didn't attack them, they wouldn't take the initiative to attack the player.

Water Spider: Level 3

Health: 80/80

Nie Yan gradually neared the Water Spider from behind. Swiftly, he raised his dagger and pounced forward. Stabbing into the Water Spider's back, he managed to attack it several times in quick succession.

The Water Spider shrieked miserably before lunging towards its attacker. Nie Yan quickly dodged, and then returned with another stab. Saving enough energy for a Vital Strike, he stabbed the Water Spider in the eye.

Letting out an agonized shriek, the Water Spider's legs shrivelled up and curled towards its body as it floated on the surface of the water.

After dying, it dropped a single copper. Nie Yan caught the

copper coin it dropped before swimming off towards another Water Spider.

The drop rate for Fine Silk was 0.5%. In other words, Nie Yan needed to kill around six thousand Water Spiders in order to obtain the thirty pieces of Fine Silk. This would require about three days of nonstop grinding.

Three days would be enough time for Nie Yan to raise his level to three, learn the Combat Medic skill, and return to town to purchase a few skill books. His strength would improve quite a bit.

In the far distance, Nie Yan saw a Water Spider moving at high speed on the surface of the lake.

[A single spell fell from the Heavens](#) and struck the Water Spider down. Soon, a damage value of thirty-six floated over its head.

It was Holy Smite—a spell used by Holy Mages.

There's another person in this area?

Nie Yan became vigilant and went on high alert. Looking far off into the distance, he noticed a person being pursued by a Level 3 Water Spider.

It was quite far away, so Nie Yan could only see that this person belonged to the Holy Mage profession. Not only this, but the Holy Mage was a woman as well. She was clutching a blue-coloured staff

in her hand and was wearing a white mage robe over her body. However, he was still unable to clearly distinguish her features.

It seemed that she was in a bit of trouble. Nie Yan stayed silent for a moment. Afterwards, he dived underwater and swam towards her. If she was a hostile player, he would kill her without hesitation. However, if there was no enmity, he would lend her a hand.

That Holy Mage was dealing with the pursuing Water Spiders. By coincidence, she was also swimming over in his direction.

At last, Nie Yan's head broke out of the water. He was now approximately five meters away from her.

Noticing another person—Nie Yan—popping out of the water, the Holy Mage tensed up. Immediately, she changed directions and swam over to another location.

She was currently being chased by several Water Spiders. If she encountered a person who took pleasure in kicking others while they were down, it would undoubtedly mean her death.

Both parties were already in close proximity.

When the Holy Mage turned her head around, Nie Yan could clearly see the other person's appearance. She was a beautiful looking young woman. Her hair was tied back in a ponytail, with a single lock of hair hanging down from the side of her face. Her

cheeks were white, and her eyes were as clear as water.

Although Conviction altered a player's appearance, they were only slight adjustments. The overall attractiveness of the player would not be altered. Hence, their level of attractiveness would fundamentally be the same as it was in reality. This was also one of the reasons why Conviction drew people in.

Nie Yan was able to clearly see at a glance that the Holy Mage across from him was a real beauty.

The Holy Mage worryingly gazed over at where Nie Yan was located—their two eyes converged. She turned around and continued to fend off the Water Spiders. Simultaneously evading three Water Spiders was definitely a little challenging. However, she still remained very calm. Using a Haste scroll on herself, her speed immediately increased by several fold.

After recognizing the opposite party's appearance, Nie Yan's mouth opened so wide a chicken egg could fit in it. How did I end up meeting her here!?

He couldn't help emotionally sighing at how minuscule the world was.

The beautiful woman across from him was called Yao Yao (Dark Mystery). Come to think of it, in his past life, the two of them actually had a rather complicated and ill-fated relationship. Never did he expect that they would meet again here. It appeared lovers or enemies could truly not avoid meeting with one another.

Perhaps this type of chance encounter was meant to be.

Nie Yan and his friends were going to enter an instance. However, they were short a Mage. Thus, one of his friends brought Yao Yao into the team. This was the first time they had met. Afterwards, they gradually grew closer when they found more opportunities to party up later on and had many more adventures together.

Old friends are the same as before, Nie Yan sighed with deep sorrow.

Chapter 11 – Assassinate Skill Book

Yao Yao was continuously placed in dangerous situations. Seeing this, Nie Yan quickly swam over in her direction.

Yao Yao became even more nervous when she saw Nie Yan swim over. There were three monsters chasing her from behind. Perhaps if she relied on her excellent skills, then she would be able to slowly whittle away their health until they died. Even then, her hopes of survival wouldn't surpass ten percent. However, if Nie Yan were to take advantage of her situation, she would essentially have no chance of living.

Noticing the three Water Spiders repeatedly launching themselves at Yao Yao, Nie Yan increased his pace and closed in from behind. Gradually, he overtook one of the Water Spiders. With his dagger in hand, he leaped out of the water's surface and stabbed at the center of its back.

Yao Yao turned around and followed Nie Yan's attack by casting Holy Smite. The spell connected and blasted the Water Spider's body, killing it in the process.

She gazed over and stared at her savior. Since Nie Yan had helped her deal with the Water Spider, Yao Yao presumed he didn't have any malicious intents.

Nie Yan directed his attention to another Water Spider—one that had only half of its health remaining. Using Vital Strike, he stabbed the spider in the eye and dealt fifty-two damage.

In the blink of an eye, only one of the three original spiders remained standing.

What a powerful attack! Yao Yao stared in astonishment at Nie Yan. In her mind, out of all her friends, she had never met anyone as strong as him. Looking again, he seemed somewhat unfamiliar.

After Nie Yan finished killing the second Water Spider, he immediately swam over to the third.

With two people against only a single spider, the situation immediately appeared to be much more relaxed.

Yao Yao brandished the staff in her right hand and cast Holy Strike. The attack landed on the remaining Water Spider's body.

"Thank you." Seeing that the three Water Spiders were completely wiped out, Yao Yao faced Nie Yan and expressed her gratitude. However, she still remained on alert, just in case Nie Yan decided to suddenly attack.

"No need to be polite, it was only a slight effort. Hi, I'm called Nie Yan (Nirvana Flame)." Nie Yan smiled brightly, and began to recall, in the past Yao Yao had been a very gentle and understanding girl. She was a very considerate person. Though she was a little headstrong as well—for a girl, it wasn't too hard of a shortcoming to accept.

“My name is Yao Yao (Dark Mystery).” Evidently, she still remained quite cautious. She had never met Nie Yan before, so it wasn’t very easy for her to let her guard down.

Nie Yan wanted to add Yao Yao as a friend and find out what she was doing here. However, so as not to make it appear too sudden, he wouldn’t ask these inappropriate questions immediately. After all, Yao Yao was still a girl. Despite understanding that she remained cautious when facing him, Nie Yan still firmly believed that from his understanding of Yao Yao, the two of them could still become friends like before.

Back then, after he became acquainted with her in the game, it was always her who would stay by his side comforting and encouraging him whenever he felt really depressed or frustrated. The two of them still remained friends. However, a certain relationship had unwittingly occurred between the two of them. From thenceforth, the complications between the two could not be broken nor tidied up.

Yao Yao quietly observed Nie Yan. Looking at him, he gave the impression of being very young and he didn’t seem like a bad person.

The two people didn’t exchange any words afterward. Due to Yao Yao’s cold nature, it caused the two parties to become somewhat silent.

“Today you saved me, so I want to thank you. How about we add each other as friends?” Yao Yao broke the ice by speaking.

“You’re welcome. So, why are you here farming Water Spiders?” Nie Yan asked. This place was quite a far distance from any towns. Hence, few players would frequent this area.

“One of my quests is to kill Water Spiders and collect their Water Sacks,” Yao Yao replied. As she began to recall the prior events, she thought, That was quite a close call. Just a moment ago, I nearly died to the monsters here. If I died, then these past three to four days of painstaking efforts would’ve gone down the drain.

“That’s great; I also happened to accept a quest that requires me to kill Water Spiders, but to gather their Fine Silk instead. We should party up and kill these spiders together. The Water Sacks will go to you, and Fine Silk to me. How about it?” Nie Yan suggested.

Yao Yao remained silent for a moment. Then she nodded her head and said, “Alright, however, we both have to agree to one condition. If a person finishes collecting the materials they need, then they can leave at any time.”

She chose to put forth these conditions so if she felt Nie Yan were being useless when they were killing monsters together, she could leave immediately.

“That’s only natural. I’ll start the party.” Nie Yan sent Yao Yao a party request.

System: Yao Yao has become a member of your party.

“I have twelve Fine Silks on me right now. I’ll give them to you. Just consider it a thank you gift.” Yao Yao opened her trade window while she spoke.

“Twelve Fine Silks is the equivalent of thirty-six coppers!” Nie Yan shook his head in refusal.

“Are you meaning to say that my level’s worth of experience isn’t even worth thirty-six coppers? Besides, I don’t have any use for Fine Silk anyways.” Yao Yao stared at Nie Yan. Her eyes were quite large and round, while her eyelashes were slightly raised. She appeared to be quite smart and quick-witted. Yao Yao clearly showed that she didn’t want to owe him a debt. Furthermore, she also came up with an idea to pay him back. Since it was also favourable for him, Nie Yan didn’t have any reasons to pester her more about it.

“Fine.” Nie Yan confirmed the trade. Once Yao Yao was set on a matter, she would become very stubborn. Hence, Nie Yan didn’t want to argue further and cause the atmosphere to become too stiff.

“That’s more like it.” Yao Yao let out a faint smile once she saw Nie Yan accept the trade.

In this way, Nie Yan had taken a large step towards completing his quest.

Nie Yan began organizing his inventory as he quietly observed

Yao Yao. Compared to the time when the two had first met in his past life, she seemed slightly more immature. Her skin appeared white as snow, while the lake waters that had soaked into her clothes caused her tight-fitting robe to accentuate her curvaceous figure even more.

Nie Yan distinctly remembered the day when they were in the dungeons under Fenarte city. When Yao Yao had taken off her clothes, her bare and perfectly curved body resembled the carving of a goddess.

On that erotic and lascivious day, both of them became completely dominated by the most primal of urges.

However, they clearly understood... this was only a game. Neither of the two had the courage to approach the other in real life. After that event, they gradually returned to the roles of just being good friends. Only, that one instance had ended up turning into a magnificent mistake. It became a lifelong memory that could never be erased, submerging itself deeply within their hearts.

Nie Yan and Yao Yao chatted for a while, talking about topics related to nothing but the game. However, the two still chatted rather amicably.

“How about we start going?” Yao Yao blinked while staring at Nie Yan.

Nie Yan’s appearance could only be regarded as ordinary. Indeed, he was unable to compare to the several people on her team.

However, the way he treated people wasn't bad. So in that sense, he was much more pleasing to the eye than her other companions.

Two people hunting monsters was much faster than a single person alone. Nie Yan tanked, dealing with the monsters in the front while Yao Yao attacked from the back with Holy Smite and Holy Strike. A Holy Mage's damage output was really powerful. Compared to Nie Yan's damage, it was much higher. Though naturally, when it came to comparing attack speed, she wasn't able to reach Nie Yan at all.

Nie Yan's mind went blank for a moment as he began to recall those matters in his previous life. Immediately, he regained his focus. Those matters in the past were already over. He'll become good friends with Yao Yao again, however, he absolutely wouldn't make that mistake again. Xie Yao was the only person who was engraved in Nie Yan's heart. After all, everything in a game is only an illusion. In the end, even the most harmonious of virtual lovers would also eventually part ways.

"Have you joined a team yet?" Yao Yao asked.

"At present, I still haven't."

"How come? With your skills being so good, I wouldn't be surprised if there were a lot of teams competing to recruit you." Yao Yao felt rather puzzled.

"I'm used to training alone. As for joining a team, I'll think about it in the future. There's no meaning in joining a team in the early

levels after all.”

Nie Yan finished speaking and lunged towards a nearby Water Spider. Very quickly, Yao Yao followed up with a Holy Smite.

Just as the Water Spider was about to make a move, Nie Yan’s dagger had already stabbed into the spider’s abdomen, killing it in the process. The pair coordinated extremely well and had a tacit understanding.

This was the first time Yao Yao had felt so relaxed while farming monsters with another person. She couldn’t help but have some doubts in her heart and wonder, could she have met Nie Yan somewhere before?

“Nirvana Flame (Nie Yan), Nirvana Flame (Nie Yan)... it couldn’t possibly be him, right?” Muttering to herself, Yao Yao stared at the figure of Nie Yan’s back. Dazedly, she began to feel he somewhat resembled a person she knew.

[TN: Remember, Nirvana Flame and Nie Yan—his real name—have the same pronunciation when spoken in Mandarin.]

“Our team currently has only seventeen people, so it’s still not full. Do you want to join us?” Yao Yao suggested. Although Nie Yan is only Level 2, his skills are quite good. Big Sis Blue Feather (Yu Lan) would most likely welcome him gladly.

“I don’t want to join any teams for now,” Nie Yan said, declining

her offer.

“Oh.” Yao Yao felt a slight sense of disappointment.

“An Assassinate skill book for Thieves dropped,” Nie Yan said.

“It’s a Thief skill book, so you should take it then. If a Mage item drops, just give it to me. We’ll each take what we need.”

After having chatted for quite a while, the two gradually became more familiar. Thus, Yao Yao also wouldn’t haggle over any drops with Nie Yan.

“Then, I’ll be helping myself.” Nie Yan gazed at the Assassinate skill book.

Skill book: Assassinate

Skill description: Thieves gain Rage after a successful strike.

Required for use: Action (requires weapon)

Skill attribute: Hitting a target’s vitals adds an additional Attack +2, Rage +1, Combo Count +1.

Skill cooldown: 30 s

Profession Limitation: Thief, Warrior, Paladin; can be learned by any faction.

Nie Yan wasn't like those whom she had partied up with before. They would put on an act of sincerity and decline, only to accept it right afterward. Yao Yao's expression changed into a slight smile. While interacting with Nie Yan, she had unexpectedly developed a sort of familiarity that penetrated deeply into her bone marrow. Right here, she didn't need to act in the sort of manner she did in real life—always putting on many false facades.

Nie Yan finished learning the Assassinate skill. Thus, his skill bar had another skill added to it.

A Thief's attack skills were divided into Basic Skills, Combo Skills, and Finishing Skills. Basic skills could be used at any time. Combo Skills were used to obtain a combo count, and to build up Rage when attacking an enemy. Vital Strike and skills similar to it were classified as Finishing Skills. They were only able to be used after building up a sufficient amount of Rage. Every additional point added to the combo count would give an additional +20% in Attack. The upper limit for this combo count was ten stacks. Once they were used, the combo counter would reset to zero.

As such, this was the beauty of the existence known as the combo system. If two Thieves possessing the same skills were to match up, the damage an expert level Thief would deal was often two to three times higher than the average thief—sometimes even more.

Under ordinary circumstances, it was considered quite normal for a Thief to have twice as many Basic Skills and Combo Skills

than Finishing Skills in their skillset.

After obtaining Assassinate, Nie Yan's Rage was now able to build up at a much faster rate. One normal attack followed by Assassinate would build up enough Rage to use Vital Strike.

Nie Yan and Yao Yao became increasingly skillful in their coordination. Thus, the two of them acted more daringly as they accelerated the rate at which they hunted monsters. During the times when there were many opponents, Nie Yan would be dealing with three monsters at a time while Yao Yao frantically cast spells from behind.

Her staff never stopped moving, continuously firing off Holy Smites and Holy Strikes. When she was out of mana, she would drink a mana recovery potion.

As long as one wasn't interrupted by an attack from the enemy, a Basic Mana Recovery Potion would restore sixty mana in thirty seconds. The price was also inexpensive, so it was extremely cost-effective.

"How many Water Sacks have you collected?"

"Fifty-two."

"How much more do you need?"

"Eight more."

“It seems you’ll be finished collecting them very soon. You probably haven’t learned Alchemy Crafting yet, right? After you’ve handed in your quest, go to Moste Town [356.329.31]. That place should have a Hidden NPC who issues the quest called ‘Rare Herbs.’ After you’ve completed the quest from the NPC, you’ll be able to learn Perfect Alchemy Crafting,” Nie Yan said. Perfect Alchemy Crafting’s effectiveness was a lot more powerful when compared to common Alchemy Crafting.

Ahhhh... I’m going to complete my quest so soon. Yao Yao suddenly felt a sense of loss in her heart. Hunting monsters together with Nie Yan was far more enjoyable than leveling alone; at the very least, she had a companion to chat with.

Chapter 12 – Extra Income

“Why learn Alchemy Crafting?” Yao Yao (Dark Mystery) asked in a puzzled tone.

“Mages who don’t learn Alchemy Crafting are certain to become poor beggars by the time they reach a high level. After all, magic potions are extremely expensive. The innate skill of a Human Mage is that they are able to skip a grade when creating magic type potions. It would simply be too much of a waste if a Mage didn’t learn Alchemy Crafting,” Nie Yan replied.

“Alright then, I’ve recorded the coordinates. Thanks for the recommendation, Nie Yan.

After noticing the movements of a water spider just ahead of him, Nie Yan began swimming towards its location. It was in an area about five meters away. Though suddenly, he stopped and swam no further. The Water Spider in front of him wasn’t exactly the same as an ordinary Water Spider—its build was slightly larger than average.

Water Spider Leader: Level 3

Health: 160/160

“It’s a Leader monster,” Nie Yan turned his head and said to Yao Yao.

“Can we beat it?” Yao Yao asked. Nie Yan was more

knowledgeable than her. So somehow, she was starting to get used to asking Nie Yan whenever she had a question.

“Just barely. Only... it’s going to be slightly difficult.” Nie Yan surveyed the nearby area. The open water didn’t have any terrain they would be able to make use of. Not to mention this region was a haven for Water Spiders.

“If it’s too dangerous, then we should let it pass,” Yao Yao added. It would simply be too much of a loss if they ended up dying and dropping a level. For it would take two to three days’ time at minimum if they desired to train back to their current state.

“Do you have any Underwater Breathing Pills?” Nie Yan asked. The Water Spider was a type of creature that could only move on the water’s surface. Hence, they were unable to dive underwater—a fatal weakness of theirs.

“I don’t have any more. I didn’t carry enough and ended up using them all before.” Yao Yao’s expression had turned a shade of red. She hadn’t expected that—while on this journey—she would be required to use up so many Underwater Breathing Pills. If she did have enough pills, she also wouldn’t have met with such dangers. She could dive underwater whenever she encountered danger, and there would’ve been no problems at all.

“I still have one more pill with me... Take it. Water Spiders can’t dive underwater, so you’ll be the one attacking it first. If you’re forced into close quarters with it, then dive underwater immediately. I’ll be in the distance shooting crossbow bolts to draw it away. Once it’s gone far enough, resurface and continue

casting. When its health nears zero, we'll regroup and face it then," Nie Yan said after contemplating for a moment.

Using this method, they could gradually whittle at the Water Spider Leader's health until it died.

"I didn't see it before, but that head of yours is truly useful." Yao Yao couldn't help but stare at Nie Yan. In his hands, any sort of problem simply became a cakewalk to resolve.

"When I was younger, my IQ was tested to be at two hundred and six. Matters such as these are a mere trifle!" Nie Yan smiled before swimming over to another side.

Seeing the appearance of how pleased Nie Yan was with himself, Yao Yao couldn't help but break out into a grin. Really, this guy, give him a little praise and he gets so happy.

Seeing that he was about twenty meters apart from the Water Spider Leader, Nie Yan signaled Yao Yao.

She waved her staff and cast Holy Smite. The spell struck the Spider Leader's body, dealing fifteen points of damage to its health. [Health: 145/160]

What's with this Leader monster? Its defense is actually higher by a lot!

「Hiss!」The Spider Leader let out a strange screech and began

sprinting towards Yao Yao. Before the Spider Leader was able to reach her location, she could still cast one more spell. She began to activate Holy Strike.「Boom!」A beam of light exploded forth, falling from the Heavens and smashing down onto the Spider Leader's body—causing it to lose sixteen health. [Health: 129/160]

Once Nie Yan finished arming his crossbow, three bolts fired out in succession.「Putt! Putt! Putt!」All of them hit their target. -6, -6, -6

[Health: 111/160]Three damage numbers floated above the Spider Leader's head. Afterwards, he continued to rearm the crossbow.

Having finished casting Holy Strike, Yao Yao saw that the Spider Leader had charged close to her position. Almost immediately, she dove back into the water.

After Yao Yao had dove underwater, the Spider Leader had no means of getting to her.

The Spider Leader was skittering back and forth fretfully on the water's surface, where Yao Yao had submerged.

「Whsh! Whsh! Whsh!」Three bolts arrived at their target, hitting the Spider Leader's head. [Health: 93/160] Nie Yan immediately attracted its attention, and the spider went sprinting towards his location.

Nie Yan anxiously resupplied his crossbow with bolts. Before he could even finish fully reloading, the Spider Leader had already rushed in front of him. He hurriedly swapped his crossbow for his

dagger.

“Assassinate!”

Nie Yan struck out with Assassinate, stabbing the Spider Leader in its flank—dealing twelve points of damage to its health bar.
[Health: 81/120]

The Spider Leader leapt forward and struck him, causing Nie Yan to lose sixty health.

What a strong attack!

If I suffer another hit, I'll undoubtedly die!

Nie Yan originally wanted to fight it out for another round. However, when he was facing a danger of this degree, he didn't dare take the risk. In the next moment, he dove into the water.

The Spider Leader's next strike hit empty air. Raising its sharp stinging legs, it stabbed into the water below. Its legs were similar to arrows raining down and entering the water's surface. One struck Nie Yan and pierced directly into his shoulder.

-32

A damage value floated atop Nie Yan's head.

The Spider Leader had succeeded in hitting with one of its attacks. Soon after, another leg came piercing towards Nie Yan.

Nie Yan did a quick roll within the water. The Spider Leader's awl-like leg pierced through the water, just past Nie Yan's cheek, causing a large streak of bubbles to emerge.

Close call! Only after Nie Yan dived a bit deeper, did he finally leave the Spider Leader's attack range. He had a little less than twenty health remaining. Next time he wouldn't confront the Spider Leader head on.

“Sacred Art!”

Taking advantage of the Spider Leader's attention on Nie Yan, Yao Yao cast her strongest spell dealing twenty-seven damage to its health.

[Health: 54/120]

“Are you alright?” Yao Yao asked in a worried tone. She saw two very large damage values float over Nie Yan's head.

“I'm fine. The Water Spider Leader's attacks are too powerful. By all means, do not get hit by one of its attacks,” Nie Yan said while still having some lingering fears. He had underestimated the Spider Leader's attack capability and nearly died.

“Okay, I understand,” Yao Yao answered back and continued to

brandish her staff.

Under her unceasing bombardment of attacks, the Spider Leader's aggro shifted back to Yao Yao. Once more, it charged in her direction.

“Holy Smite! Holy Strike!”

-15 [Health: 39/160]

-16 [Health: 23/160]

After Yao Yao finished casting another round of spells, she once again dove underwater.

The Spider Leader irritably skittered around the water's surface. Nie Yan then fired off another three bolts, hitting the Spider Leader in its butt. [Health: 5/160]

So after kiting it back and forth, the Spider Leader's health bar was gradually drained clean. Following Yao Yao casting one final Sacred Art, the Spider Leader's health bar dropped to zero. its body floated above the surface of the water, shrivelled and curled up.

The entire process was simpler than they had imagined.

Seeing the Water Spider Leader meet its death, Nie Yan finally relaxed and sighed in relief. After killing it, his experience bar rose to fifty-two percent.

“What item did it drop?” Nie Yan asked.

“Come and see.” Yao Yao put the two items she just picked up into the trade window.

Fine Silk Gloves (Bronze Grade)

Level Requirements: Level 0


Properties: Defense 2–3, Magic +3

Weight: 1.3 lb

User Restriction: Mage; can be equipped by any faction

Rare Fine Silk (Raw Materials)

Quantity: 5

“You have the Appraisal skill?” Nie Yan asked. It’s reasonable to say that recently dropped items should be unidentified. He would’ve never expected that Yao Yao——with her Level being so low—had already learned the Appraisal skill.

Yao Yao nodded her head and said, “Correct! I learned the most basic Appraisal skill.

“The gloves go to you and, since I need it, the Rare Fine Silk to me,” Nie Yan said. What difference does this Rare Fine Silk have with ordinary Fine Silk? I wonder... will Physician Blevins accept this Rare Fine Silk, or not?

“En, I won’t be polite then,” Yao Yao said. Fortunately, those gloves were just what she needed—having Magic +3 as a property. To a Mage, an increase in Magic was the best property they could wish for in a piece of equipment. If it were placed in the market, it would go for at least fifty or sixty coppers. If one calculated, Nie Yan had received the raw end of the deal. Yao Yao felt slightly apologetic, but recalling that Nie Yan had also picked up the Assassinate skill book earlier, she became less flustered.

Yao Yao placed the Rare Fine Silk in her trade window. Afterwards, both of them pressed accept.

While the two were conducting the trade, they were both really close. Nie Yan glanced at Yao Yao’s cheek. Her skin tone was as healthy as ever—jade like porcelain so white, he couldn’t find a single blemish.

“What are you staring at?” Yao Yao asked in a panicked manner. Being gazed at by Nie Yan caused a deep red to emerge from her cheeks, lightly spreading across her face.

Seeing Yao Yao’s expression redden like a tomato, Nie Yan laughed and swam towards a nearby Water Spider.

After an afternoon of killing monsters, Nie Yan had collected twenty-three Fine Silks, and Yao Yao finally finished gathering the Water Sacks she required.

“In a few days, my team will be hunting in the Treant Forest near Tellak Town. We still have a few spots, do you want to join?” Yao Yao pretended to ask in a casual and nonchalant manner. However, in her heart, she actually had some faint hopes and expectations that Nie Yan would accept.

Treant Forest is a small Level 3 instance; it’s one of the basic instances. The difficulty for basic instances is usually high. The final Treant King is pretty troublesome as well—an Elite monster. If a Fighter’s Defense stat didn’t reach sixty, and their health wasn’t at least two hundred and twenty, they basically have no chance.

“How many people do you have?”

“Including you, we have eighteen: two Fighters, two Berserkers, two Paladins, two Thieves, three Priests, and seven Mages.”

“How much defense and health do your Fighters have?” Nie Yan asked. If her team is skilled, there’d be no harm in going once. Treant Forest drops quite a few good Thief-related items.

“Fifty-three Defense, and two hundred thirty health.”

“Their health is fine, however, their defense is too low. I’d still advise you guys to not go,” Nie Yan said as he shook his head. The Fighters’ stats were lacking a bit.

“Why?” Yao Yao opened her eyes widely, staring at Nie Yan in

bewilderment.

“The Treant King has a two percent chance of landing a critical hit. Therefore the Fighters’ defense and health must be high. The Priests’ Heal skill also needs to be able to follow up. Otherwise, if a critical hit occurred and your Fighters are killed, then your whole team will end up being wiped. Although you don’t drop equipment or levels in an instance, you’ll still lose twenty percent of your experience. Which is enough to be unbearable for most people.”

“How do you know this?”

Nie Yan faintly smiled, but he didn’t reply.

“Although I feel what you’re saying could possibly be correct, they’ve already been preparing for many days. I can’t just refuse to go, right?”

“Just listen to my words. Have your Fighters get their defense to sixty, first, then you can go,” Nie Yan said. If Yao Yao didn’t listen to his warnings and went now, she was sure to lose twenty percent of her experience. Fortunately, twenty percent wasn’t all that much. With less than a day’s worth of training, she could gain it back.

“Defense of sixty... it’s only possible if we get another piece of Bronze-tier equipment at the very least. That’s going to be too difficult,” Yao Yao said while shaking her head. A piece of Bronze-tier equipment was at least, but not limited to, five or six times the price of ordinary equipment. At minimum, it would cost at least

three to four silvers. Their team definitely didn't have such financial power.

“If you can refuse, then just refuse. However, if your friends really are determined to go, then there's no helping it. In any case, it's only twenty percent experience, nothing more.”

“Nie Yan, is what you said true?” Yao Yao furrowed her beautiful brows and asked with concern.

Nie Yan nodded his head and swam over to a nearby Water Spider that was off to his side.

Yao Yao's intuition told her Nie Yan's words were credible, yet she was still quite puzzled. How did Nie Yan know about this information? Could it be... Had he already been to the Treant Forest before? Even if he did go there previously, it was still impossible for him to obtain such accurate data so quickly.

“I've finished my quest, so I should get going. Today has quite enjoyable. Training together with you was very fun. Nie Yan (Nirvana Flame), how about we add each other as friends? So in the future, I can contact you again,” Yao Yao said. In her heart, she felt a little reluctant to part. Nie Yan was the very first friend of the opposite gender she felt happy being around with. Of course, her intentions were for them to be within the boundaries of friends and nothing more.

“Sure,” Nie Yan responded, and added Yao Yao to his friend list.

“I’ll be leaving first then. Bye bye!” Yao Yao said while waving her hand in farewell.

The figure of Yao Yao’s back became increasingly distant.

Once Yao Yao left, Nie Yan felt a bit of melancholy. However, very soon, he adjusted his mood and continued to kill Water Spiders.

One after another, spiders continuously fell at the hand of Nie Yan’s dagger.

He looked at the time—still three hours until the game closed. 「[Pururu! Pururu! Pururu!](#)」Nie Yan received a voice notification.

“Expert, it’s me,” Stone said via a voice message.

“What do you want?” Nie Yan replied back.

“I have a friend who wants to meet you.”

“I’ve been very busy lately. I don’t have the time.”

“My friend said he’s willing to pay the two silvers required to obtain the guide for the Fallen Shaman camp.”

“Did your team get wiped out by the wooden fences there?” Nie

Yan asked. That area was an extremely difficult hurdle. If you didn't know the trick to get through, then passing was extremely difficult.

“H-how'd you know?” Stone asked in surprise. Nie Yan had guessed correctly. He became more certain—Nie Yan had definitely beaten the Fallen Shaman camp in the past.

“Of course, I know. You guys want the Fallen Shaman Camp guide? That's fine. First send the money over to my personal storage.”

A personal storage was the same as an account. Players themselves were free to access their own storage. They were even allowed to send money and items to another player's storage, but they were not allowed to take anything out.

“This... I'll have to ask first,” Stone said. It was evident he wasn't the one making the decisions. After a moment, he sent another voice message to Nie Yan. “My friend said we're able to send one silver in advance as a down payment. If your guide truly is effective, then we'll send the other half of the payment.”

Nie Yan thought for a moment and said, “Alright, that's fine.” Due to Nie Yan having hit the mark several times on the things he spoke of, the other party was willing to do this trade. However, by paying first, they were taking on a huge risk. If by chance Nie Yan was actually a swindler, it would be the same as if they flushed their money down the toilet. Thus, they chose to send the first half as a down payment.

「System: Player Flying Stone has deposited one silver into your personal storage.」

“The money... I’ve already sent it,” Stone messaged again. He was a little bit nervous. If Nie Yan really was a scammer, then their one silver would completely go to waste.

“The first hurdle you’ll face is by the wooden fences. There are seven Fallen Shamans in that area. Don’t send your Warriors to tank. At Level 5 and under, they’ll be completely unable to resist a volley from seven Fallen Shamans attacking together. Instead, send your Thief over to the willow tree outside the fence and station them there. Tell them to use their bow or crossbow to shoot at the Fallen Shamans to the left. Remember carefully; there cannot be any mistakes in where you shoot. Only then will you be able to draw out three Fallen Shamans and kill them. After you’ve gotten rid of them, the remaining four should be much easier to deal with. The second important location is off to the side of the altar; there’s a Fallen Shaman Priest located there. When facing him, if you’re not careful you’ll end up aggroing the Fallen Shaman Leader as well. Once every five minutes, the Fallen Shaman Priest will start walking around. Wait until it walks past the altar and arrives next to the obelisk. Then, have your Fighter draw it outside to about five or six meters away, where you’ll surround and kill it. Afterwards, you’ll be able to kill the Fallen Shaman Leader. If you still have any problems, just send me a message,” Nie Yan said. This was taking another’s money to help them avoid disaster. In any case, it was just a small instance. Very soon, someone would come along and beat it. So it was quite good that he managed to exchange some information for a bit of spending money. What’s more, it was two entire silvers.

“That’s all...?” Stone asked in a daze.

“That’s all.”

Just this little bit of information was worth two silvers. Nie Yan had earned this money a bit too easily.

However, this method for overcoming the hurdles was summed from the experiences of countless players. An average team needed to go through this instance at least several times before they could get a feel for it. In that perspective, perhaps the guide wasn’t that expensive after all.

Chapter 13 – Golden Electric Eel

Kalore City transfer point.

At present, a group consisting of twenty or so players were gathered together in a heated discussion.

“I definitely think that guy’s a swindler. How could he possibly know the strategy for the Fallen Shaman Camp!?”

“That person shouldn’t be a swindler. Otherwise, how was he able to correctly guess where our party was wiped? Only by having a deep understanding of this [instance](#), could he have known where we would fall apart.”

Everyone had differing opinions. Hence, it was very hard for them to come to a conclusion.

“Stone, what’s up? Has he said anything?” asked a Warrior on the side. He was Sleepy Fox, the captain of the team.

Stone then proceeded to pass Nie Yan’s words on to them.

A Priest pondered to himself for a while, before looking at his teammates and asking, “Do you guys think his words are trustworthy?”

“Hard to say....” replied a teammate beside him. The several

hurdles they had to pass in the Fallen Shaman Camp were too difficult for them. It was to the extent that they had all been wiped out before even having a chance to encounter the Fallen Shaman Priest.

“We can’t say for sure whether or not this Nie Yan (Nirvana Flame) has already beaten the Fallen Shaman Camp with a team.”

“He really is an expert. Remember the area where I was farming, near the Fallen Shaman Camp? It was he who had told me about it. He said that he used to have a Warrior account in the past, but he deleted it and made a new Thief account. I have a feeling his old Warrior account was around Level 4, at the very least. If not, how could he know so much?” Flying Stone said as he argued in Nie Yan’s defense. In regards to Nie Yan’s words, Stone held a firm belief in him.

“So we’re gonna try his method then?”

“Everyone! Begin your preparations. We’ll be setting off in ten minutes,” the Priest called out as he came to a decision.

“Big Brother Fox, are we actually going?” another Mage asked.

“I believe his words hold some degree of credibility. Otherwise, he wouldn’t be so knowledgeable of the Fallen Shaman instance. Let’s give it a try. If that person ends up being a swindler, then I’ll make him pay the price,” said Sleepy Fox in a confident manner. Truth or lie, he was still able to distinguish the two. If it weren’t for them getting wiped at the instance prior to this, he wouldn’t

have allowed Stone to contact Nie Yan for help.

Nie Yan was still killing Water Spiders and gathering Fine Silk. The whole process was rather mundane and boring.

He was in the middle of fighting against a Water Spider; one that was already on the verge of being defeated.「Hiss! Eee!」The spider let out an intense high-pitched cry.

In the distance, six Water Spiders were alerted by the noise. Their movements showed that they were heading to flank Nie Yan.

Simultaneously dealing with two spiders was his limit. Any more, and he had absolutely no chance of winning.

Nie Yan leapt forward. With a single Vital Strike, the lone Water Spider that had been surviving on low health was killed. As the spider fell, a single copper dropped from its corpse and floated into Nie Yan's hand. By that time, the six charging Water Spiders had already neared him.

Without delay, Nie Yan dived into the water below and swam towards the lake floor.

Upon arriving at their destination, the six spiders skittered about on the water's surface as they tried to find traces of Nie Yan.

However, Nie Yan continued to swim a fair distance away. After about a minute, he felt himself start to suffocate. He turned his head and looked up to the surface of the water. Unexpectedly, the amount of spiders roaming around his location had increased in number. If he were to go up at this moment, he would certainly die.

For the sake of not drowning, Nie Yan had no choice but to activate the underwater breathing ability of the Water Aversion Pearl. He prepared to resurface after finding an area with fewer Water Spiders.

A ray of light was cast down upon the lake, illuminating its serene depths. Near the lake floor, Nie Yan's eyes noticed a faint flash of golden light. His heart skipped a beat. This... it couldn't be some kind of treasure, right?

In any case, the duration of the Water Aversion Pearl's ability is pretty long. Nie Yan continued his descent, diving deeper into the depths of the lake.

It was deep to the extent that one could not see the bottom, and the deeper he dove, the greater the pressure he felt bearing down on his body.

Strange rock formations were clustered around the surrounding lake floor. Between these rocks were dim narrow passages where one's field of view would only extend to about two meters.

Nie Yan was able to see a few Black Iron Crystals and other types

of ores covering the tops of these rocks. It was a pity he didn't have the Mining skill. Thus, he could only leave them be.

A stream of cold water flowed between the strange rocks, battering Nie Yan's body and causing him to feel a cold chill.

Suddenly, a huge gold-coloured eel came out from the rocks and swam past Nie Yan's side.

The sudden appearance caused Nie Yan to jump out in fright. When he was finally able to see it clearly, he discovered that it was a Golden Electric Eel!

Just a while ago, that golden flash of light he had seen from above was actually this eel!

The Golden Electric Eel was a type of rare monster that ranged from Level 0 to 20. Their temperaments were gentle and docile, so they never attacked the player first. However, if a player attacked them first, they would retaliate by using the back of their tails to release an intense electric shock. In the water, this was a powerful killing move.

Though, Golden Electric Eels would normally drop some good equipment when killed. At the very least, it would be Bronze-tier.

Golden Electric Eel: Level 0

Health 80/80

Fortunately, it was only a Level 0 Golden Electric Eel. If the level were a little higher, Nie Yan basically wouldn't stand a chance.

Nie Yan swam beside the eel and followed it closely. He was trying to find weaknesses as he observed its three-meter long body.

The eel didn't seem to mind Nie Yan's existence in the slightest. To the point where it even swam a few laps around his body.

It had been reported that the Golden Electric eel's weak point was its neck. Nie Yan swam over to check and discovered red-coloured scales covering its neck.

That's the Golden Electric Eel's weak point!

Nie Yan swam with the Golden Electric Eel until they finally reached a narrow crevice between the rocks. Raising his dagger, he swiftly stabbed towards the eel. Dark red blood gushed forth as Nie Yan activated Assassinate while the dagger entered the eel's neck.

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The Golden Electric Eel never expected that the player beside it would attack. It struggled violently, wanting to break free from its attacker.

Nie Yan firmly held onto the eel. However, its entire body was covered in a slippery mucus—making it very difficult to hold onto.

The Golden Electric Eel swung its tail and a powerful electric shock bombarded Nie Yan's body.

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When the electric current struck, it felt as if ten thousand ants were stinging him all at once. He was unable to move as he felt his whole body go numb.

The Golden Electric Eel's attacks have a paralysis effect!

In his absentmindedness, Nie Yan noticed that the Golden Electric Eel was trying to escape. Once again—with dagger in hand—he stabbed into the eel's body. The dagger was imbedded near the eel's spine.

He tenaciously held onto his dagger.

The Golden Electric Eel swam forward, dragging Nie Yan with it. Once again, another electric shock blasted his body, causing a damage value of twenty-three to float above his head.

Golden Electric Eels were a special class of monster. They were even a bit stronger than Leader monsters. If the Eel's level had been just a little higher, then Nie Yan would have already lost his life a long time ago.

Feeling himself almost lose consciousness, Nie Yan forcefully shook himself awake.

The eel swam at an extremely fast pace as it moved through the narrow crevices between the rocks. Blood kept gushing forth from its wounds, dying the surrounding water red.

After a while had passed, the Golden Electric Eel once again let loose an electric shock, battering Nie Yan's body and dealing sixteen damage.

The amount of electricity within the Golden Electric Eel's body was limited. Consequently, the more times it released an electric shock, the weaker its power would become.

The eel dragged its attacker along, unceasingly attacking him as it swam about for five or six minutes. Nie Yan's health continued to drop until he was left with only twenty-three health remaining. With great strain, he managed to use a Basic Health Potion.

The repeated electrical shocks had paralyzed his whole body. Even making the slightest of movements was incredibly difficult.

After finally becoming exhausted, the Golden Electric Eel stopped. Nie Yan quickly seized this opportunity. Using the dagger in his hand, he activated Vital Strike and stabbed into its neck.

The Golden Electric Eel continued to struggle by wrapping itself tightly around Nie Yan. He felt himself start to suffocate with the

eel completely coiled around his body.

-5, -5, -5 One by one, these damage numbers floated above Nie Yan's head; his health had only fifteen percent remaining.

Seeing his health continuously drop lower and lower, Nie Yan quickened his attacks. The dagger in his hand unceasingly stabbed at the eel's neck.

-8, -8, -8 The Golden Electric Eel's health appeared to have finally reached zero. It gradually loosened its coil, then flipped over and revealed its white belly.

Nie Yan finally broke free from the eel's hold. Using his right hand, he caught a piece of equipment that the eel had dropped—a pair of gloves.

Soft Leather Gloves (Bronze)

Properties: Unidentified

A Level 0 Golden Electric Eel should drop Level 0 equipment. As for the properties, I still need to go back to the city to get it appraised. However, since it's leather equipment, a Thief can definitely use it.

Nie Yan placed the Soft Leather Gloves in his bag space. Gradually, the paralysis effect on his body wore off. He also didn't know where the Golden Electric Eel had dragged him off to, so Nie Yan began swimming towards the surface.

As he swam through the dark narrow crevices between the rocks, Nie Yan discovered a small plant in the distance. It danced and fluttered about as it followed the movements of the currents, lying firmly planted atop the rock.

This small plant was half an inch in length, with three tile-shaped green leaves that were as soft as silk.

Looking at its features... this should be Waterscale Grass!

Nie Yan's eyelids jumped. There were six recipes for creating mana potions. Among these recipes, Waterscale Grass was the main ingredient out of the raw materials required to make them. Generally, the lowest tier of Mana Potion was worth around thirty coppers. Therefore, this Waterscale Grass—as the main ingredient—would be valued at around twenty coppers.

Not far from where the Waterscale Grass was located, two red-coloured water snakes emerged.

Flowerscale Water Snake: Level 3

Health: 100/100

Nie Yan lingered by the side for a moment, waiting for the water snakes to swim away. Only after they moved away, did he swim over to the area where the Waterscale Grass was growing. The plant resembled a gecko as it sat firmly atop a rock. Nie Yan finally plucked it and placed it in his bag.

This ought to be an area where Waterscale Grass grows. Nie Yan began searching around the area, eventually finding two more Waterscale Grasses. Heh... pretty good harvest.

Nie Yan swam up towards the surface until his figure broke through the water. Spending such a long time within that dark underwater environment was truly oppressive. At last, he could breathe a sigh of relief.

His location was still within the Water Spider's territory. So, Nie Yan continued farming Water Spiders. By the time the game servers were about to shut down, Nie Yan had managed to pick up a Paladin skill book—Divine Light Slash. This was one of the beginner skills for a Paladin. At the moment, its price should be about thirty coppers.

His luck wasn't bad. The drop rate for the Divine Light Slash skill book didn't exceed one in ten thousand. Some people could end up killing Water Spiders for several days, and they still wouldn't find this skill book.

「System: The servers will be shutting down in three minutes. We request that all players prepare to go offline.」

Nie Yan found an area that seemed safer than others and concealed himself within. After three minutes passed, his vision went dark.

By the time he logged off the game, it was already nine in the morning. A new day had begun, and people were getting ready for work. Due to the implementation of a three hour work day—one hour of work in the morning and two in the afternoon—their schedules were fairly relaxed. Students, on the other hand, were beginning the day's summer recreation.

After finishing breakfast, Nie Yan began to exercise. His old man—having a military background—had harsh and strict expectations for Nie Yan. Thus, his foundations were pretty good. Back then, he persisted for two years in tempering his body for the sake of assassinating Cao Xu. He employed special forces training that he had gotten from the internet. The training methods were extraordinarily abnormal. Due to being too old at the time, he missed the optimum period of time to train his body. Thus, the results weren't that amazing. However, he still had the ability to easily knock out two or three grown men.

When referring to two or three grown men, Nie Yan was referring to adults who had at least some training. The increasing productivity had liberated people from the toils of hard labour. Thus, the modern man placed an increasing importance on elite—martial and intellectual—education. Beside the core academic courses, electives such as kickboxing, taekwondo, and boxing could also be taken. Since people studied martial arts from a young age, everyone's physical fitness was pretty decent. At the very least, they would know a few martial arts techniques. Today, there was a never-waning abundance of huge martial arts tournaments of all kinds. Speaking precisely, the present society is one that promotes the martial spirit.

He didn't have any equipment at home, so he could only do a few basic exercises. In the future when his family would have more money, he could buy equipment and body enhancing medicines; the effects would be much more distinct.

He exercised for an hour and did twenty minutes of martial arts training. Afterwards, Nie Yan began to review his schoolwork. In this day and age, making use of one's knowledge was of the utmost importance, and the knowledge contained in textbooks covered just about everything. Starting from small—such as simple physics and chemistry—to the large—such as manufacturing polymers, aircrafts, small scale nuclear batteries, etc... all of these were covered. If he managed to put all of the knowledge within these textbooks to use, let alone manufacturing aircrafts, even constructing a mecha wouldn't be a problem at all.

People in this age—with advancements of bio-electric stimulation in medicine—had an average IQ of a hundred and sixty or higher. On the higher end, a person's IQ was even capable of reaching two hundred and sixty. However, throughout their whole lives, these people would still be completely unable to master all of the accumulated knowledge left behind by their predecessors.

During high school, scoring fifty or sixty percent on a test paper could already be considered not bad. There wasn't a failing grade in these tests. However, every test mark would be recorded and entered into an individual's overall evaluation.

Nie Yan—when he was in his first and second year of high school—was ranked among the top three in terms of academics. However, after he transferred from his school to a high-class one

in the city, his achievements could only be ranked at the bottom. In this world, perhaps you could do plenty of things if you had money. However, knowledge is what secured a person's position indefinitely. Perhaps Nie Yan's father, using his money, could pave a future of brilliant prospects for him. Though, whether or not he was able to walk down this path... Nie Yan was still required to rely on himself.

Chapter 14 – Close Friends

Nie Yan studied for an hour, then went back to training. Whenever he was hungry, he would take out a portioned tube of nutrition tonic from the fridge and then go back to studying. He continued this cycle of studying, training, and eating until one o'clock in the afternoon.

「Ring! Ring!」The phone in Nie Yan's home rang out.

“Hello. May I ask who this is?” Nie Yan picked up the phone and asked.

“Nie Yan! How about we go out and play? I'm almost suffocating to death by staying at home.”

The voice Nie Yan had just heard belonged to Tang Yao. The pages in his memories once again began turning. Tang Yao was his best friend—the two had known each other since they were in diapers. Though Tang Yao's family eventually became quite wealthy, and they moved away to the city. However, their family ended up purchasing a villa near this town. So every summer, he would come over to visit and stay for a while.

Tang Yao, this person was an especially loyal friend. In Nie Yan's previous life, when he had become very poor, it was Tang Yao who braved the risks of being discovered by Cao Xu and secretly provided financial support to him. This allowed him to pass those harsh days much more easily.

However, Tang Yao had one fatal weakness; he loved frequenting bars and womanizing. One time while drinking at a bar, he got into a fight with another man over a woman and ended up being beaten to death by that person. Due to the other side's background being too great, the case was left unsettled.

Tang Yao, you're still alive! This is great. In this lifetime, I will definitely not let that sort of thing happen again.

All of a sudden, tears began gushing forth and pouring out of Nie Yan's eyes.

"Hello? Nie Yan, don't just die on me. Say something."

"Where are we going?" Nie Yan asked after restraining his emotions.

"Let's go to the PK bar. Are you interested? Recently, this Conviction game has been really popular. Have you play it yet?"

"I've been playing. I'm a Level 2 Tempest Thief," Nie Yan replied. The PK bar is a gaming and entertainment club where players can transfer their characters from the game and compete with other players in various scenarios. This type of duel wouldn't raise a player's level, nor would it affect their progress in the game. Only occasionally were players able to win one or two pieces of equipment through gambling with other players.

"Not bad at all! You've already risen to Level 2. When did you

buy a game helmet?” Tang Yao asked, somewhat astonished. He remembered Nie Yan’s family was not well-off at all.

“I’ve had it for some time now.”

“Let’s head out then. We’ll have a stroll over to the PK Lounge. I have a Level 3 Arcane Mage by the way,” Tang Yao flauntingly said in a somewhat proud tone.

Nie Yan faintly smiled. Eighteen-to nineteen-year-old kids all want to show off even the smallest accomplishments. Naturally, this was human nature. However, Nie Yan had already long passed that age.

At the current stage, anyone who was able to rise to Level 3 was a decently skilled player. Such players were in the top ten percent of the player base. However, Nie Yan knew that Tang Yao’s skills were still a bit lacking if he wanted to go to the PK Lounge. The number of experts at the lounge were not few. It was a place where all sorts of experts gathered.

“Us going there to play is fine. However, it’s best if you don’t gamble,” Nie Yan said. From his memories, Tang Yao loved to gamble, yet he would never win—not even once. This never dissuaded him, however, and he continued to enjoy it. Luckily, the amount of pocket money Tang Yao had wasn’t very much, so losing wasn’t that big of a deal. With the current teachings, the head of the family wouldn’t give their child too much money. This was to avoid having that child form bad habits and become a good for nothing in the future.

“Since when did you become such a naggy old lady? Hurry up, I’m heading downstairs.”

“Alright then,” Nie Yan reluctantly replied with a hint of helplessness in his voice. He understood Tang Yao’s character. Preventing him from gambling was definitely impossible. Nie Yan only wished to remind him to show a little restraint while he was by Tang Yao’s side.

In his past life, there was a time when he didn’t go with Tang Yao because he had fallen ill and didn’t feel well. He heard that during that time Tang Yao had lost over three thousand credits.

Nie Yan washed up his sweaty body, changed his clothes, and headed downstairs.

“That brat, why is he still dawdling around?”

By the time Nie Yan came downstairs, Tang Yao had already arrived in his hover-car and parked next to Nie Yan’s house.

Nie Yan pushed down the emotions stirring within his heart. He hadn’t seen his friend in ages. The current Tang Yao was still the simple short little fatty he remembered. He and Nie Yan were of the same stature; it wasn’t until their third year of high school that they would grow in height. The handsome and confident Tang Yao from that time was entirely different from the one currently before him.

“I was taking a shower.”

“Get in the car! Hurry up! It wasn’t easy slipping away, and when I get home my old man’s gonna call me to help him out with his work again,” Tang Yao urged.

Nie Yan opened the car door and got in.

“We haven’t seen each other in nearly a year, huh? You brat, you still haven’t grown at all.”

“You’re the same too,” Nie Yan said with a smile. This type of close and familiar feeling came back to him again. Tang Yao, it’s been almost three years since we’ve last met...

“I lost over a thousand at the PK Lounge yesterday. Now this Young Master is burning with anger. I definitely have to beat those several brats until they only have their underwear left,” Tang Yao hatefully said. He stepped on the gas pedal, and the hover car shot forward as if it were an arrow.

“Those guys, were they Wei Kai’s group?” Nie Yan recalled. He remembered those several people were the neighbourhood bullies. When he was still going to school in this area, he was bullied a lot by them.

“It was exactly them. Yesterday I wanted to vent out some anger towards them in your place,” Tang Yao gloomily said.

In Tang Yao's mind, Nie Yan had always been very cowardly and timid—the type who didn't dare to utter a word when they were bullied. Thus, Tang Yao was always very protective of him. However, he was unaware that the present Nie Yan was no longer the previous weak and afraid person he once knew.

“Yo! You've arrived Young Master Tang, and just on time.” An eighteen to nineteen-year-old youth came walking forward. He was dark-skinned, with a skinny build. The clothing on his body looked like it hadn't been washed in several days. Once he spoke, he gave off a delinquent type of feeling.

His name was Wei Kai. Due to his dark skin—a shade that would make him seem invisible during the night—Nie Yan and Tang Yao had once wondered if he were of African descent. Secretly, they started only referring to him as “Black Person.” A nickname which ended up spreading later on. This caused Wei Kai to direct his hate towards both Nie Yan and Tang Yao. However, he was still a little afraid of Tang Yao, as Tang Yao's father was the CEO of Linzhou Airline—someone he couldn't afford to offend. Consequently, from time to time, he would look for Nie Yan to start trouble with instead.

There were also five others following behind him, though they were a bit younger. They were all a part of his group.

“Oh, this brat Nie Yan also came. Tsk, tsk. He still hasn't learned enough of a lesson from last time.”

Those several brats grinned maliciously as they stared at Nie Yan.

In his previous life, Nie Yan heard that Wei Kai caused some trouble and was exiled to another planet. Afterwards, there was no more word of him. The current Nie Yan, after reincarnating, could barely be bothered to keep these few delinquents in his mind. Regarding the bullying he received back then, what meaning was there for him to collect his debts now?

“No need to worry, you have me here with you. They won’t dare do anything to you.” Tang Yao spoke in a low voice and attempted to comfort Nie Yan.

Nie Yan nodded his head.

Tang Yao couldn’t help but look at Nie Yan. The latter seemed especially calm today. This brat. Looks like he finally gained some courage.

“Less bullshit. Did you bring the money?” Tang Yao said to Wei Kai.

“No worries, I brought two thousand. However, you’ll be the one paying for our entry fee today.” Wei Kai took out a bank card, shaking it in his hand.

“Only a hundred or so credits and you’re making such a hassle about it.” Tang Yao slanted his lips in disdain as ruthless words came out of his mouth.

“I’m not like Young Master Tang right here who’s so well-off with money. Our little group of commoners has no choice but to bother about this small amount of money,” Wei Kai smilingly replied without the slightest bit of anger.

From an adult’s perspective, Nie Yan reexamined Wei Kai. He discovered Wei Kai, although simply a delinquent, still carried an air of shrewdness about him. There were many people like Wei Kai, fumbling through society, gaining a lot of knowledge and experience along the way.

“God damn. Isn’t it just him having a rich old man? What’s so amazing about that?”

The several youngsters behind Wei Kai couldn’t bear Tang Yao anymore, and began cursing at him one after another.

Tang Yao treated his friends very well. The reason his words were so unkind today was most likely because of Wei Kai and his group frequently bullying Nie Yan.

Tang Yao ignored those several youngsters and walked up to the counter. He took out two hundred credits, placed them on the reception desk and then said, “Boss, open up a private room for us. No need to return the change. Also, have the attendants send some drinks over. No coke please.”

“Room number six. This is the card for your room.” The manager handed over a card to Tang Yao as he spoke.

“Please. You lead the way, Young Master Tang,” Wei Kai said while laughing. Then briefly, he swept his gaze towards Nie Yan. Their eyes locked, as they met face to face. Nie Yan stared back at him calmly.

Wei Kai was mildly surprised. Today, Nie Yan appeared to be distinctly different than how he was in the past. Previously, whenever Nie Yan met him, he would be timid and afraid. Yet today, he was unusually calm.

The group of people went over to room number six.

Nie Yan and the rest entered the room. The interior was separated into two areas. Each area had five platforms with recliners and machines. Players could hold 1v1, 2v2, 3v3, 4v4, and 5v5 battles. If they wanted to hold larger team battles, they were required to rent out a larger room.

Nie Yan and Tang Yao entered one area and closed the door. Their area and Wei Kai’s were separated by a glass wall.

“What level is Wei Kai?” Nie Yan asked Tang Yao.

“A Level 3 Berserker,” Tang Yao replied. Yesterday they had fought ten matches, and Tang Yao only won three of them. After he returned home, he had his father’s underling find him an Arcane Blast skill book, as well as a Bronze-tier mage robe which he exchanged for his own. He was well prepared to beat Wei Kai in a few matches, and thoroughly return all the losses he had received

yesterday.

Ten matches. The prize for every match was two hundred.

“What skills do you have?” Nie Yan asked. For good or bad, Nie Yan had played Conviction for many years. Even if you’ve never eaten pork, you’d still be able to recognize a pig. So although he never played Arcane Mage before, he had faced them countless times in battle. As such, he somewhat understood their abilities.

“Arcane Missiles, Arcane Fireball, Arcane Blaze, Arcane Blast, and Magic Return.” Tang Yao spoke without thinking. He never considered Nie Yan to know a lot about Conviction, as he had already trained up to Level 3, while Nie Yan was only Level 2.

“What’s your health and mana?”

“One hundred and twenty health, and one hundred and fifty mana,” Tang Yao replied. His equipment could be considered decent for a Level 3 Arcane Mage.

“Has Wei Kai learned Provoke yet?” Nie Yan asked. He was really confused. With this set of skills, just how did Tang Yao manage to lose in his previous life?

“He’s learned it.”

“No wonder.” Nie Yan suddenly understood. After a Berserker learns Provoke, if they were able to use the skill well, they could

easily suppress an Arcane Mage.

“It’s about to begin,” Tang Yao said as he put on his game helmet.

Tang Yao was most likely going to lose. Nie Yan thought for a bit. He would continue observing for a while more. If Tang Yao started losing badly, then he would make a move.

They swiped their IDs over the machine and then put on their game helmets. The machines here would automatically extract the player’s character information from Conviction and duplicate it. They were able to conduct battles here, and since the data was only a copy, it would have no relation with Conviction.

Everyone entered the game. Nie Yan and those five youngsters were placed in an auditorium, and the arena chosen was random. It appeared the first one would be in the mountains.

The mountainous terrain was especially advantageous for Arcane Mages.

Tang Yao and Wei Kai both finished their preparations. Following the sound of a system prompt, the two began the battle.

“Hey, brat. Long time no see. A Level 2 Tempest Thief huh, not bad. Are you interested in having a match?” The one who spoke was one of the boys from Wei Kai’s group. Nie Yan faintly remembered that this guy’s name was Shi Feng (Stone Mountain).

A Level 2 Battle Thief!

There was an essential difference between Battle Thieves and Tempest Thieves. Battle Thieves had a more elegant title called Knight-errants. They were the same as Tempest Thieves in that they both had the Stealth skill. However, when fighting, they placed a greater emphasis on combat. Usually, they used weapons such as daggers and had decent close combat abilities.

The properties of professions are all unique. There was no division of strongest and weakest professions. Conviction had no weak professions—only weak players.

Nie Yan shot a glance at Shi Feng and said with indifference, “You’re still unworthy. Picking such a skillless profession like a Knight-errant, you have poor tastes.”

“Seems you’re missing a beating. Do you believe this grandfather won’t give you one once we leave the game?” Shi Feng cursed back at him. He didn’t expect that Nie Yan—who had always been a yes-man—would dare to speak rudely to him.

Nie Yan raised his eyebrow. They were just a few brats, nothing more. What did he have to fear? Even though his current body’s health was a little weak—to the point where it was poles apart from his previous peak condition—by relying on his fighting skills, he would be able to deal with these kids who had barely reached adulthood, and still have energy left to spare. These good-for-nothings were a level inferior to Wei Kai. They were still a bunch of students, yet they dressed like delinquents and poured obscenities out of their mouths—thinking of themselves as

gangsters. They were very childish. Though, in reality, being a gangster was also a type of profession that required skill to make a living.

“If you have the guts, then come out and fight me next match.”

“Only one match? The stakes for this gamble are too small. I’m not that interested,” Nie Yan said. Wasn’t it too simple of a task to take care of Shi Feng?

“The brat’s grown up, huh? I have three hundred here on me. Let’s have a match. How about it?” Shi Feng took out a bank card. Nie Yan, this brat’s becoming more and more courageous. If I don’t teach him a lesson, he truly won’t know how high the heavens are and how thick the earth is.

“I’ll only play one game. I’ve got seven hundred.” Nie Yan brought out his bank card. He swiped it to show the amount of money in the card was seven hundred credits. This amount of money—to the eighteen-year-old Nie Yan—was an amazingly huge sum of money.

“Any of you guys have money? Lend me a few hundred.” Shi Feng turned his head and spoke to the friends beside him.

“I’ve got two hundred.”

“I’ve got a hundred.”

“I’ve also got a hundred.”

After borrowing four hundred, Shi Feng finally had seven hundred credits. He hung out with Wei Kai, but after all, he was still a delinquent and never had much money on him.

Nie Yan glanced at Tang Yao and Wei Kai’s battle. In the mountainous terrain, Wei Kai wasn’t able to fully display his Berserker’s abilities, and the match was won by Tang Yao. The next match was in open plains. Tang Yao would likely lose this one.

“Let’s go then.” Nie Yan withdrew his glance, then spoke to Shi Feng.

The scenery of the two people switched over. Soon, they appeared in a jungle. Thick vegetation surrounded them everywhere, and the two were separated by about fifty meters.

“Little brat. Watch this grandpa teach you how to respect others.”

Nie Yan faintly laughed. He didn’t even bother having a verbal showdown with Shi Feng.

Shi Feng muttered, whispering to himself, “Why is Nie Yan giving off a feeling that would make others feel unsettled today?”

「System: Match start!」

Nie Yan and Shi Feng both activated Stealth.

Stealth didn't equal invisibility. When a Thief uses stealth, their body would melt into the background. If one didn't observe carefully, it was really hard to detect. However, if one concentrated their attention, they could still make out the flaws in the camouflage.

Stealth was based on a Thief's Dexterity and their ability to hide themselves. Being discovered would depend on the other player's eyesight.

At this time, the two were approaching each other. Nie Yan's footsteps were light and gentle. If he came across leaves and branches, he would carefully move around them. He left no footprints behind. After playing Thief for so many years, if he were to be discovered by a novice like Shi Feng, he'd be losing too much face. Nie Yan's eyes moved like electricity as he scanned the area. On a branch in the far distance, there was a trace of unusual movement. Focusing his gaze, he was able to distinctly make out the vague figure of a person. He had quickly discovered his opponent's position.

Shi Feng was moving about slowly and cautiously, carefully paying attention to his surroundings. However, to him, it seemed as if Nie Yan had disappeared completely. Shi Feng couldn't find any traces of him whatsoever.

A Thief's ability to conceal themselves was very closely related to

their surroundings. The more complex the background, the easier it would be to find them. However, if the background were simple and only had one colour, even if the enemy carefully observed, it would be very hard to discover them.

Just like a stick insect sticking to bamboo, they would completely melt into the background. Even if a predator came up close to it, they would still be unable to discover anything.

Stealth's effectiveness was also greatly related to a player's ability to control their movements. While in Stealth, the route and pace you walked in were all things that required very careful attention.

For Nie Yan, he basically didn't need to conceal himself in such a meticulous manner. The motions of concealing himself had become instinctive to him. These movements had long penetrated through the core of his being, down to the bone marrow.

After ten years playing as a Thief, even an idiot would still turn into an expert, let alone Nie Yan—whose comprehension abilities could already be regarded as quite decent.

Chapter 15 – Viewed In A New Light

Shi Feng brushed Nie Yan's side. Though, unexpectedly, he had moved past without noticing his opponent.

“Dammit... Where is that brat?” Shi Feng muttered under his breath. He had yet to realize that he had already been exposed.

Nie Yan trailed behind Shi Feng, following him closely. His gaze was focused on the area around Shi Feng's back.

The dagger in Nie Yan's right hand resembled lightning as it swiftly stabbed towards the back of his unsuspecting victim.

By the time Shi Feng felt something wasn't right, it was too late. Nie Yan's dagger had already arrived, penetrating deeply into Shi Feng's back.

「Shlink! Splurt!」The dagger easily cut into him, dealing thirty-one points of damage to Shi Feng. Evidently, his defense stat wasn't very high.

One attacked, and the other was being attacked. Immediately, the effects of Stealth for both players disappeared simultaneously.

Having finally discovered his assailant, Shi Feng turned around and retaliated. He slashed back at Nie Yan, sweeping his dagger in a wide arc.

Shi Feng's dagger seemed to be just a bit short in length. However, that lack in blade length signified a miss as his dagger passed by Nie Yan.

“Vital Strike!”

Nie Yan's dagger seemed to carry a cold glint as it streaked through the air, slitting Shi Feng's throat.

「System: Vital Strike successful! Attack +5%, resulting in additional damage dealt!」

In one fell swoop, the seventy-nine health Shi Feng had remaining was instantly depleted. His eyes were filled with disbelief as if he had seen a ghost.「Thud.」His body collapsed onto the jungle floor.

The entire course of events had taken place in merely a few seconds. Nie Yan still had full health remaining.

The corner of Nie Yan's mouth faintly curved into a sneer. He wasn't required to showcase even the least of his abilities to deal with this novice Level 2 Knight-errant.

Both of them were returned to the auditorium at the same time.

“Shi Feng, what the hell happened?”

“Just how... how did it end so quickly...?”

The several youths encircled Shi Feng and began asking questions. On the video screen, they saw the figures of both Nie Yan and Shi Feng in combat after they had come out of stealth. In that fleeting moment, they were basically unable to clearly see, nor understand, what had occurred near the end. Within the blink of an eye—in simply a few exchanges—Shi Feng had already collapsed on the ground.

“His movements were really fast.” Shi Feng recalled their earlier exchange. Nie Yan had only made a few simple movements, yet his speed was simply unbelievable. Moreover, Nie Yan had killed him in two strikes; one of them hitting him in the vitals. Inside the game, the system would assist a player’s movements when executing skills. However, when it came to reaction speed, judgement, sense of attack and so on, all of them relied on the player’s own capabilities. Shi Feng had a hard time imagining what sort of disastrous outcome would occur if the two of them were to end up fighting in real life, especially if Nie Yan had a blade in his hand.

As he stared at that person’s figure, Shi Feng recalled all the times they went to him looking for trouble. He remembered how that person would always grin and bear through their humiliation without a hint of resistance. If that same person from the past had always been faking it... now that would be truly too terrifying. As he thought back to that dagger in Nie Yan’s hand, Shi Feng felt a cold chill run through his heart.

“I lost.” At that moment, Shi Feng didn’t dare to refute his

defeat. The facts were arranged right before everyone's eyes. Furthermore, he had also lost to Nie Yan's boldness during the fight.

There was no need to fear those who acted arrogant and tyrannical. In reality, their tough appearances were merely poor disguises; Shi Feng was one such person. What people like him feared the most were those who possessed great strength and could endure without ever wavering.

Shi Feng began to think of Fourth Elder Lei who opened a restaurant in Gatehead Village. He truly was an amiable and gentle person. In the past, this area used to have a bunch of gangsters who would frequently go to his place. There they would freeload food and vandalize the restaurant. Fourth Elder Lei had always let them do what they wanted, bearing through their humiliation. There was a time when Shi Feng had gone to his restaurant in order to freeload food with ten or so other people. By chance, they ended up meeting his daughter who had just returned. Fourth Elder Lei had grown into a hunchback, but that daughter of his was actually fairly lively and beautiful. Several of them couldn't resist trying to get their hands on his daughter.

Fourth Elder Lei begged for mercy, but those gangsters wouldn't have it. They started to tear off his daughter's clothes which enraged Fourth Elder Lei. He grabbed his kitchen knife and cut down three of those gangsters—they were instantly killed on the spot. Then, with his knife, he chopped off Boss Yin's arm. Fourth Elder Lei's whole body was covered in blood, yet he remained calm and unperturbed, allowing the customers on the side to call the police. At that time, Shi Feng was so frightened he nearly urinated in his pants.

Since Fourth Elder Lei had acted in self-defense, he was only sentenced to half a year in jail. After that, no one dared to cause trouble at his restaurant, nor lay a hand on his daughter again.

People who could endure silently were the most terrifying. It was because if they were to snap one day, they would reveal their full ferocity—becoming fiercer than anyone else. Remembering the scene of that day, Shi Feng felt his body break out in a cold sweat.

After experiencing something like that, Shi Feng had honestly and properly behaved himself for a while. Afterward, however, he began following Wei Kai's group. After experiencing the fight today, his whole body began to quiver. If they were to bully Nie Yan and push him to the brink one day, would he snap just as Fourth Elder Lei had? Would Nie Yan grab a blade and ruthlessly slash their throats akin to what Shi Feng had just experienced in the game?

“In the future, it'll be better if we don't provoke that guy anymore. He's definitely hard to deal with.” Shi Feng warned the several people beside him in a solemn manner.

“Shi Feng! You can't be terrified after losing just one match, can you? From now on, we don't know each other.” One of the youths by his side cursed at him. The others around him had also exposed expressions of disdain.

“I'll still pay you guys back the money. As for the loss, it's no big deal anyway,” Shi Feng said. He suddenly understood. Although

people like them felt good when they often bullied others, there would come a day when all their debts are repaid in full—just like that matter with Fourth Elder Lei. On that day, Boss Yin lost both his arm and his position as the boss. Now he could only make a living by scavenging for trash. As for those three gangsters who were cut down, they couldn't even make a living as they had lost their lives.

“Get out. Scram.”

Nie Yan no longer paid attention to Shi Feng and the others. He continued looking at the scene of the match. The competition between Tang Yao and Wei Kai was still in the second round. Since it was on an open field, this time, Tang Yao had lost his advantage. Eventually, he was killed by the slash of Wei Kai wielding his sword.

One after another, the matches continued. After they had finished ten matches, Tang Yao had won two, while Wei Kai had won eight. As a result, Tang Yao lost a thousand and two hundred credits.

“Fuck, Wei Kai that bastard also learned a new skill. This time, it's the Berserker skill, Resist Magic Aura. This beating is truly depressing,” Tang Yao said while he fumed with anger. Resist Magic Aura increased the player's magic resistance. A Berserker with this skill was practically the bane of all Mages.

“You know, Resist Magic Aura only decreases your damage by a little bit. When you're PvPing as an Arcane Mage, your movements need to be quick. Secondly, you need to keep your mana

expenditure at a stable rate. Third, your reactions have to be fast as well. Furthermore, when you were fighting, your timing for casting spells was incorrect,” Nie Yan advised. In terms of strength, Tang Yao’s Arcane Mage was stronger than Wei Kai’s Berserker by a lot. The reason Tang Yao lost wasn’t because Wei Kai was more skilled than him by any means. Rather, it was because Arcane Mages had a higher skill cap. A skilled Arcane Mage could effortlessly toy a Berserker of the same level to death. However, an unskilled Arcane Mage would easily be hacked to death by a Berserker of the same level. Simple professions like Berserkers, which were tanky hack and slashers, didn’t require much skill to play at all.

“You brat! I didn’t expect that you knew so much,” Tang Yao said in admiration. In retrospect, Nie Yan’s words made quite some sense.

After pushing open the door, Wei Kai and his group came over from the other side with Shi Feng following from behind. The latter glanced at Nie Yan with a somewhat complicated expression on his face.

“Young Master Tang, it seems that your brother here is growing up more and more. Surprisingly, he even defeated Shi Feng.” Wei Kai’s narrow and slender eyes glanced over towards Nie Yan. In the past, Nie Yan had always been a well-behaved punching bag. Indeed, it appeared the Nie Yan of today and the Nie Yan from the past just weren’t the same. Be it expression or temperament, there was quite a large change in both.

Wei Kai switched the video on the screen over to the time when

Nie Yan defeated Shi Feng in their fight. Afterward, he played it back in slow motion. The entire fight had concluded within three seconds. Looking at the screen, Nie Yan's movements and attacks were flawless and watertight.

After watching the video, Tang Yao stared at Nie Yan with an astonished gaze, as if what he had seen was unimaginable. This brother of his, just when had he become so courageous and powerful?

“Just a few moments ago, you had a match with Shi Feng?” Tang Yao was a little dazed. He still didn't dare to believe that person in the video was Nie Yan.

“Just a small match. He was too weak, though,” Nie Yan replied in an unrestrained manner, not minding the people near him at all.

Wei Kai gave a meaningful glance, signaling the youth who wore [a flower pattern shirt next to him](#).

This action caught Nie Yan's eye. That person was called Li Yang—Wei Kai's right-hand man.

“Brat! Don't get too conceited. Do you believe I can't beat you down?” Li Yang approached Nie Yan and came at him with a kick. His age was one or two years younger than Nie Yan, however, he was taller and more robust in comparison.

Nie Yan was a little short. Combined with his poor nutrition, he was also very thin and weak.

Nie Yan coldly smiled, then dodged Li Yang's attack. He followed up by kicking Li Yang's supporting leg, stamping on the knee joint. He was no longer the same youth who had been so easily bullied in the past.

His current strength was not one bit inferior to a second grade mixed martial artist. It was just that his body was still weak. However, when it came to dealing with wannabe gangsters like them, he had more than enough energy to spare.

"Ahhhh!" Li Yang let out a miserable shriek as he reeled back, stumbled, and then fell.

That blood-curdling scream sent chills through the hearts of everyone who witnessed this scene.

With this show of force, Shi Feng was reminded of Fourth Elder Lei. At that moment, he felt becoming an obedient student at school would be quite a wonderful and fortunate idea.

"You're courting death!" The several youths behind Wei Kai wanted to charge in and give Nie Yan a painful and thorough beating. However, they were all pulled back by Wei Kai.

Li Yang's prior actions were simply Wei Kai's way of probing Nie Yan. Though admittedly, he was also greatly surprised.

Unexpectedly, the timid and cowardly Nie Yan—who was always grinning and bearing through humiliation—actually had this kind of skill. From his experience, he had only seen those kinds of quick movements from a few people. Martial arts wasn't something one could quickly improve in only two or three days. It required long periods of training. Only then would one be able to slowly improve. Could it be...? Nie Yan's cowardice in the past, was it all just an act?

Why is it that no matter how I look at him, Nie Yan seems completely different today?

Ignoring Li Yang who was still clutching his leg and screaming on the floor, Wei Kai walked up to Nie Yan and said, "Young Master Nie, are you interested in playing a match?" He had even changed the way he addressed Nie Yan. After drifting through society for so long, he knew which kinds of people he could touch, and which he could not. Nie Yan had just revealed his skill, and completely put Wei Kai in awe.

"There's no harm in playing one or two matches. However, I won't play if the stakes are too small." Inwardly, Nie Yan felt unavoidably shocked—this Wei Kai was quite a character. The criminal bosses of the underworld acted outwardly kind in appearance, but commit evil deeds in secret. In addition, many of them would reveal astonishing talents when they were at a very young age, fostering them as they grew older. In his past life, he heard Wei Kai had actually become pretty well regarded. It was only until later on when he invaded another criminal organization's territory and caused a major event, did he disappear without a trace.

“A thousand a match. I have three thousand,” Wei Kai said. He had brought out all the money he had.

“That’s too unfair. A Level 3 Berserker facing a Level 2 Tempest Thief, don’t you think you’re bullying people too much?” Tang Yao said in a dissatisfied manner. There was a difference in level, and it was a heavily armoured Warrior versus a lightly armored Thief. It was obvious which side was superior.

“—Three thousand a match.” Nie Yan interrupted Tang Yao’s complaints and spoke to Wei Kai.

“Fine. I’ll keep you company then,” Wei Kai replied. He didn’t believe a Level 2 Tempest Thief was capable of turning the tables on him.

“Nie Yan, Have you gone mad!?” Tang Yao anxiously said. A Level 2 Tempest Thief versus a Level 3 Berserker; unless he was a Heaven-defying expert who could bypass the level gap, he would definitely lose this match.

“I only have fourteen hundred on me. Lend me sixteen hundred,” Nie Yan said to Tang Yao while laughing.

“God dammit. If you lose, it’s whatever. You still have to pay me back, though!” Tang Yao angrily muttered back.

“I’ll pay you back,” Nie Yan said. Although Tang Yao’s old man was wealthy, he still didn’t get a lot of pocket money. Not to

mention, it would all be earned through working for his dad. In this era, all high-class elites would educate their children in this way, making them earn their own living and become self-reliant.

“Bullshit. If you want to lose, just lose. Who wants you to pay them back anyways.” Tang Yao swiped his card, transferring over sixteen hundred credits to Nie Yan.

“Thanks,” Nie Yan said. Tang Yao was the type of person who had a sharp tongue, but a soft heart. If Nie Yan lost, Tang Yao definitely wouldn’t allow Nie Yan to pay him back those thousand six hundred credits.

In his past life, Nie Yan had received too much of Tang Yao’s grace. He had never once thought of letting Nie Yan pay him back. This is what a true brother should be like.

“Pull Li Yang up, we’re leaving,” Wei Kai said. The group of people headed back to their respective area in the room.

“Nie Yan, that brat! How did he suddenly become capable of fighting? God dammit... it hurts like hell. Next time I’ll definitely find some people to beat that shitty brat to death.” Li Yang walked over to the sofa and rolled up his pant leg. A large area on his knee was bruised completely black and blue.

“Don’t waste your breath, he didn’t even use any strength. Otherwise, your leg would’ve been broken. I want you guys to remember this from now on. No one is to provoke Nie Yan. If you meet him, I want you to hide far away. If any one of you stirs up

trouble for me, don't blame me for not being polite!" Wei Kai warned. Their school taught Taekwondo, boxing, and mixed martial arts as academic programs. He was able to make out that the movements Nie Yan had made were standard in mixed martial arts. However, in comparison to the mixed martial arts that was taught in school, his movements were much more fierce and violent. When he took action, every movement would either cause serious, or even fatal, damage. Just what kind of person is this brat?

He began to recall Nie Yan's former cowardly and timid manner. That guy's thoughts are really deep and mysterious. He was actually able to conceal himself for this long. Wei Kai felt a wave of coldness pour over his heart.

"How can we just let it pass?" Li Yang unwillingly asked.

"So...? What about it? You ask yourself, are you capable of beating him? In the future, properly go to your Taekwondo classes, and you won't lose so miserably next time!" Wei Kai replied.

"Boss, it's about to start." A youth next to him spoke.

Wei Kai put on his helmet.

In the adjacent area, Tang Yao was carefully observing Nie Yan. After a long while, he finally spoke. "Just a moment ago, I was being stupid and forgot to ask. Brat, you're actually not too bad! When did you become so strong!? One move and you had Li Yang knocked down and rolling on the floor!"

“I’ve been training at home for a while now. It’s more than enough to deal with those guys,” Nie Yan said. His body’s strength really was too weak, otherwise, his power wouldn’t be this little. Li Yang and those good for nothings were like a bunch of pillows. Only Wei Kai would be a bit difficult to deal with. Even then, he still wasn’t much of an opponent.

“You brat. You’ve certainly made me look at you in a new light. I’m still suspicious of whether or not you’re the same Nie Yan I’ve known since childhood!” Tang Yao said in quite a good mood.

“It doesn’t matter how much I change, you’re still going to be my brother!” Nie Yan proclaimed. In his past life, even when he was at the lowest point of his life, Tang Yao still viewed him as a brother. Just as distance would determine the stamina of a horse, time would eventually reveal a person’s true nature.

“For the sake of those words, let’s properly have a toast when we get back!” Tang Yao said while patting Nie Yan on the shoulder.

“Wei Kai’s already waiting inside the game.”

“Are you sure you can win?” Tang Yao anxiously asked.

“No worries, just watch and see. What? Could it be you don’t believe I’ll pay you back that thousand six hundred...?” Nie Yan laughed, joking around with Tang Yao.

“Go have your match. As for money, that kind of thing is useless to me. Even if you lose, it’s not like it’s the end of the world. Besides, you don’t get much of an allowance every month anyways... If you end up losing that fourteen hundred, you’ll be eating boiled rice for a whole month, isn’t that right?”

[TN: Boiled rice is sort of like rice gruel. Putting already cooked rice in hot water and eating it like that. Pretty bland and tasteless. It’s usually eaten by the poor.]

“Watch as I toy this Level 3 Berserker to death!” Nie Yan said with a confident smile.

“Good man! You’re getting wilder and wilder!” Tang Yao laughed.

Two people wore their helmets and entered the game.

When he reemerged, the stage Nie Yan appeared in was an open prairie. There was an endless field of lush green grass. The dense underbrush was tall—roughly reaching up to a person’s knees.

My luck is pretty bad. Turns out it’s a grassland stage, thought Nie Yan as he knitted his brows. However, even if he were in the open fields, he still had his tactics. The green background of the grassland served as good camouflage for a Thief to conceal themselves with. The only flaw was that the dense undergrowth on the ground could possibly expose his whereabouts.

“The current stage is an open field. If you think it’s unfair, we can switch stages,” Wei Kai suggested. There would be a large amount of luck involved if they were only playing a single match. Different terrains suited different professions, and the open prairie suited Warrior professions such as the Berserker—who could freely charge around swinging their swords.

Although Wei Kai was a bully, he surprisingly acted in a magnanimous manner.

“Doesn’t matter. If it’s an open field, it’s an open field.” Nie Yan grasped his dagger and entered Stealth. His opinion of Wei Kai had actually changed by quite a bit.

A gentle breeze blew past the open prairie, causing the tall grasses to bend in its direction. Gradually, Nie Yan’s silhouette faded into the background.

He has this much ability? Wei Kai felt his heart sink; his expression becoming solemn. He was observing carefully, yet he couldn’t find any traces of Nie Yan’s whereabouts. He wasn’t even able to find any peculiarities with the thick grass on the ground either.

Nie Yan did indeed have some skill. Wei Kai grasped onto his greatsword and gradually drew closer. The shorter the distance between them, the easier it would be for him to find his opponent.

Nie Yan walked alongside the wind, continuously changing direction in accordance with it. Even if he were to step on the

grass, it would slant in the same direction the wind was blowing

Chapter 16 – Arrogant Before, Respectful After!

Seeing Wei Kai draw near, Nie Yan gradually made his way around his opponent. He continued to slowly move until he was behind Wei Kai, and out of his range of vision. Then he began creeping towards his unsuspecting opponent's back, taking long and unhurried steps as he did so.

Wei Kai turned his head, surveying the area in every direction. He was unable to find anything particularly odd. All he could see were endless fields of grass rolling about gently under the influence of the wind, like waves following the ocean breeze.

Where the hell could he be?

This was the first time Wei Kai had come across a Tempest Thief who was actually able to employ Stealth to such a perfect extent. It was reasonable to say that the thick grass beneath Wei Kai's feet was an easy place for a Thief to expose themselves. Yet, Nie Yan seemed to have no issues hiding in the field with the assistance of Stealth.

Wei Kai carefully moved forward with his greatsword held close to his chest, keeping it at the ready. He believed that Nie Yan must've been moving at an extremely slow pace, in order to remain unexposed while stealthed. Hence, he came to the conclusion that Nie Yan was most likely some distance ahead of him.

However, he remained unaware of the fact that Nie Yan was

already behind him, having circled around a long time ago.

Approximately three meters were between Nie Yan and Wei Kai's back. Suddenly, a large gust of wind blew forth, turning the gentle breeze into a howling gale.

Just as the wind began to howl—as if he had been waiting for that exact moment—Nie Yan abruptly sprinted forwards. The dagger in his grasp resembled lightning as it struck out, speeding towards Wei Kai's back.

The sound of rapid footsteps and howling wind blended together, creating a mess of sounds that was hard for a person to distinguish. The gust of wind also greatly reduced Wei Kai's awareness.

Assassinate!

Nie Yan's dagger pierced into his target's back, dealing thirty-five points of damage.

Wei Kai never expected his opponent to suddenly appear behind him. He held up the greatsword and swept outwards in a wide slash.

Nie Yan dodged the strike and managed to reposition himself behind Wei Kai once again. He dashed forward, dagger in hand, and stabbed Wei Kai in the back for the second time—causing him to lose twenty-three health.

Out of the hundred and sixty health he had, only a little over a hundred points remained. Since the beginning of the fight, Wei Kai had been completely incapable of keeping up with Nie Yan's speed.

A Berserker's speed relied on their ability to quickly charge forward. A Thief's speed, on the other hand, relied greatly on their ability to make agile and nimble movements. The type of movements the two professions specialized in clearly differed.

Nie Yan's movements were fast and agile, as he stuck close to Wei Kai's back. In this short period of time, he had already managed to attack Wei Kai two times in quick succession.

This bastard is as nimble as a monkey. Wei Kai suddenly roared in anger. An aura began radiating from his greatsword as he started spinning around in circles.

“Whirlwind Slash!”

[Wei Kai resembled a top as he spun around with his greatsword.](#)

The moment Wei Kai brandished his sword, Nie Yan judged from the movements that Wei Kai was about to execute Whirlwind Slash, so he quickly retreated back about two meters.

The greatsword unleashed a strong gust of wind as it streaked through the air. The slash barely grazed past Nie Yan, almost directly hitting him. –9 A damage value floated over his head.

Despite missing, the Whirlwind Slash still managed to cause some damage to Nie Yan.

Wei Kai's attack finally ended after he had rotated three times. He gasped for breath as he thought, This bastard is so quick at dodging!

In the split second Wei Kai stopped spinning with his sword, Nie Yan dashed forward; the dagger in his hand aiming straight for Wei Kai's throat—Vital Strike!

Tang Yao, Li Yang, and the others were watching the match from outside with dumbstruck expressions. Nie Yan's movements were simply a perfection of art. From the moment he escaped Wei Kai's Whirlwind Slash, to when he attacked with Vital Strike as it ended, the timing of his every action was at the peak of perfection.

After watching Nie Yan, they now understood what PvPing truly meant. It wasn't two opposing sides simply slashing their swords at each other, but rather a battle of awareness and skill.

Within his mind, Tang Yao had a sudden flash of insight. He finally understood why Nie Yan said that his timing when casting spells was incorrect. Depending on whether or not a player took action at the right time, two entirely different outcomes could arise.

He never expected that Nie Yan, whom he had known and grown up with since they were in diapers, would possess this kind of skill.

The amount of skill Nie Yan displayed really expanded Tang Yao's horizons. There was a saying: "When a scholar disappears for three days, view them in a greater light." These words were the most appropriate to describe what Tang Yao was feeling at the moment.

Nie Yan's dagger slashed across Wei Kai's throat!

-95

Vital Strike was still as powerful as ever. In just a few attacks, Wei Kai had already been reduced to a mere seven health. Meanwhile, Nie Yan's health was still close to full. It was clear which side had established their superiority.

It was only then that Wei Kai realized the immense gap between the two of them.

"Flame Slash!"

Wei Kai was unwilling to be defeated in such a manner. Just as Nie Yan's Vital Strike ended, he took advantage of the opening that was revealed and brandished his sword towards Nie Yan. The greatsword in his grasp was enveloped by a raging flame as it cleaved downwards in a blazing radiance

The raging heat assaulted his face as it drew closer.

The might of a Berserker's Flame Slash was immense. Nie Yan

deeply understood this as a result of firsthand experience. He decisively pulled back, in an attempt to avoid the sharp blade.

Despite this, Wei Kai still managed to catch up to Nie Yan after suddenly accelerating his pace, and the Flame Slash struck him right in the middle of his chest.

-56

A single damage value emerged, floating atop Nie Yan's head.

Nie Yan took the brunt of Flame Slash. Just when he finally managed to regain his footing, Wei Kai activated his Charge skill. He approached with his sword raised, resembling a tank as he came crashing forward.

“Linear Slash!”

The sword aura formed a straight line as it came slashing down.

Nie Yan had only half of his health remaining, and the Charge skill had a brief stun duration. If he collided into Wei Kai, the Berserker's explosive power would be more than enough to kill Nie Yan in a matter of seconds.

So, Nie Yan quickly decided to pull back and retreat again. At that moment, Wei Kai's sword brushed past Nie Yan's face barely by just a few inches. Nie Yan's pupils violently contracted as he

sidestepped in an attempt to avoid the attack. He then switched the dagger in his hand to a reverse grip and slashed at Wei Kai's throat.

In the end, he was still sent flying back after being struck by Wei Kai's charge.

As Nie Yan fell to the ground, his opponent's health bar finally depleted. He staggered back up and stood firmly on both feet, then he gazed at his own health; only twenty-five points remained.

Mhmm, as expected... Facing a Level 3 as a Level 2 is a little troublesome.

Nie Yan's gaze fell on Wei Kai's corpse. Seeing that he died, Nie Yan put away his dagger.

Moments later, the two were transported away from the PvP arena and back to the auditorium.

"I'm impressed, brat. Who knew you were so capable?! Hahaha." Tang Yao approached Nie Yan as the latter took off his helmet.

"The win was a fluke, I just happened to be a little lucky," Nie Yan said. He had almost been killed by Wei Kai as well. In the end, there just wasn't enough time for him to acquire enough equipment and skills. If he had a few more skills at his disposal, then defeating Wei Kai would've taken much less effort.

“A win is still a win. Not to mention that it was a Level 2 versus a Level 3. Hey, do you know how to play Arcane Mages? Teach me how to play them when we get home, okay?” Tang Yao said as he rubbed his hands together. It seems Nie Yan really does know a lot.

“I’m not very knowledgeable when it comes to Arcane Mages. They have various unique skill builds, all of which requires different tactics. I’ll teach you what I know, though,” Nie Yan replied. When it came to Tang Yao, he wouldn’t conceal things and act selfishly.

“That would be great!” Having witnessed Nie Yan’s abilities in battle firsthand, Tang Yao held a firm belief in him.

Nie Yan gazed at his bank card, which displayed a total of six thousand credits. He took three thousand and transferred it to Tang Yao. “The thousand six hundred is what I owe you. As for the other fourteen hundred... consider it me helping recoup your loses.”

“It’s only a few thousand credits. How could that kind of money be anything between us brothers?” Tang Yao said, sounding a bit displeased. From the start, this money he had never regarded this money with any importance. Nie Yan bothering about it actually made him feel quite unhappy.

“True brothers always repay their debts. If you’re still unhappy about... tonight, you can treat me instead,” Nie Yan said with a smile.

“You’ve made so much money today, while I barely broke even. Yet you still have the nerve try and freeload off me!? You’re the one treating me to dinner tonight—end of discussion!”

“Fine then. Eating a small loss is no big deal.”

“What are we eating tonight? In any case, let’s head to a restaurant!”

“A bowl of wonton noodle soup is five dollars. That should be enough to fill you up,” Nie Yan said as he stashed away his bank card.

“I say, aren’t you being too much of a miser here?”

“Takes one to know one.” Nie Yan laughed. He and Tang Yao could be considered birds of the same feather.

Wei Kai and his group walked into the room, having come over from the other area. Tang Yao’s expression became grave upon seeing them. He knew that Wei Kai and his people had lost a lot of money today. They wouldn’t fly into a fit of rage, would they?

A smiling expression still remained on Nie Yan’s face. Compared to Tang Yao, he certainly looked a lot calmer.

“Wei Kai, you wouldn’t be trying to shamelessly take back the money you just lost, would you?” Tang Yao had inadvertently placed himself in front of Nie Yan. Subconsciously, he still

considered Nie Yan to be the same as he was in the past—an easily bullied youth.

“How could I? Money lost is money lost after all, and money won is also money earned. Even this one knows this much when it comes to gambling. You know, they say that even disputes will eventually lead to friendship, so how about we settle our debts and makeup? Young Master Nie and Young Master Tang, when you two have time in the future, you should pay a visit to our little establishment. Hmm?” Wei Kai said with a smile.

Wei Kai had been drifting through society for many years now. Contrary to what one might expect, he had actually learned how to conduct himself properly during those years. He understood which types of people he should not provoke, and as a result, he did not mention their past grievances at all.

“We’ll be sure to visit when we have the time.” Nie Yan nodded his head. Wei Kai this guy, he also knows when to advance and when to retreat.

“This one will take his leave first then. Young Master Tang, Young Master Nie, you two have fun,” Wei Kai said while smiling, bringing his lackeys with him as he departed.

“What happened to him? Why did he suddenly become so formal and courteous? That’s way too abnormal! God damn, it’s really making me uncomfortable,” Tang Yao said in a baffled tone as he stood by Nie Yan’s side.

“Who knows?” Nie Yan let out a faint laugh.

Wei Kai and his group had just left the PK Lounge when one of his underlings spoke.

“Boss, why were you treating that brat Nie Yan so politely? ‘Young Master Nie,’ does he even deserve it?” Li Yang walked up to Wei Kai and asked in bewilderment.

“You know there’s a saying, ‘Do not bully the youth when they are poor.’ Have you heard it before? In the future when you judge someone, don’t just look at the present, you also need to gaze a little further into the distance,” Wei Kai replied. He was able to discern that Nie Yan was a hidden dragon. Sooner or later, he would fly up high into the Heavens. It would be in his best interest not to become enemies with such a person.

[TN: Thanks to Deathblade for the explanation. “It’s better to bully an old poor person than a young person. If you bully a poor young person, you never know what that young person will grow up to be, and how rich and powerful they might become” – DB]

Li Yang was still at a loss as to what those words meant. However, in comparison to the rest of them, the boss was much more knowledgeable and experienced, thus he thought, The Boss’s words are definitely correct, so I’ll listen to him!

Nie Yan and Tang Yao got into a car and drove off in the direction of a nearby restaurant.

“What’s your in-game name?” Tang Yao asked. Nie Yan was a Human thief, so Nie Yan was definitely the same race as him. They both started out in the Viridian Empire!

“Nie Yan (Nirvana Flame). The ‘Nie’ in Nirvana, and the ‘Yan’ in fire,” Nie Yan replied

“I’ll come and find you when I get home then,” Tang Yao said. He couldn’t help but get excited when he thought of how he could level together with Nie Yan.

“I’m in the middle of a quest right now, so I can’t return to the city,” Nie Yan said. He still needed to hand in the quest from Physician Blevins. Moreover, he already had arrangements for future matters, so he would be unable to level together with Tang Yao.

“Eh? Nevermind then... How about you just teach me how to play Arcane Mage now, and I’ll practice it when I get back home.” Tang Yao felt a slight touch of disappointment, though he quickly went back to being excited in a few moments.

“Arcane Mages are basically divided into three groups. First, you’ve got the ones that are the most universal—Arcane Fire Mages. They wear all sorts of equipment in order to raise their magic damage. Also, the skills they learn are all similar to ones like Arcane Flame Burst; the type that has a high kill potential. Arcane Mages like these are welcome in all teams. Another kind are the Arcane Speed Mages. They wear equipment that gives a bonus to movement speed. Once they start moving, they end up being really fast. Add in the Arcane Mage’s relatively short cast time, and

you've got a build that's great at PvPing. The remaining group is essentially a balance between the last two. So, what path do you intend to take?" Nie Yan asked.

Tang Yao thought for a while, then started smiling in embarrassment as he asked, "Which group has skill requirements that are a bit on the lower side?"

"That's definitely going to be an Arcane Fire Mage then. As long as they have good equipment, and high damage, all teams will want them. When fighting in a team, all you need to do is keep on attacking and you'll be fine. However, that kind of Arcane Mage has no chance when PvPing." With just a glance, Nie Yan could tell that Tang Yao wanted to be lazy. This scoundrel's brain isn't dumb; he's just too lazy to use it.

"I won't be able to PvP!? Ahhhh! That's way too boring!" PvPing was just too exciting of an activity for him. Without it, half of the excitement in his life would be gone! Now, Tang Yao felt rather unwilling.

"It's better if you choose a balance of both then. Before you allocate your points, make sure you consult with me first," Nie Yan advised. Conviction was designed so that every five levels from Level 1 to 30 would grant a player five stat points, and one skill point to allocate. Therefore, for a player, every five levels prior to Level 30 was a minor watershed in combat power.

"Alright then, I understand." Tang Yao happily agreed. If he had Nie Yan helping him allocate his points, then he would be saving himself a lot of trouble. What he hated the most was thinking

about these types of complicated matters in the game.

“I still have some business to attend to after we finish dinner. We’ll contact each other in the evening when we get in the game, alright?” Nie Yan said.

“Alright.”

After the two had dinner, Tang Yao dropped Nie Yan off and then went home himself.

Having been out for so long, Nie Yan had wasted a lot of time. Upon arriving back home, he immediately went off to train, then study once again.

Chapter 17 – Lacerate

As Nie Yan opened up his textbook, various equations ranging from complex mathematics to theoretical physics appeared in front of his eyes. He managed to quickly solve all of them in a surprisingly short amount of time. In light of this development, he noticed that his cognitive abilities had vastly improved since his reincarnation. Though it hadn't reached the point where he developed photographic memory, his memory had still improved quite significantly. Moreover, he sensed that his mind had become sharper as well. For example, he had finished twice the amount of work in half the time when he was studying.

In addition, there was an even more astonishing discovery. He felt neither the slightest bit of fatigue nor weariness despite having intensely exercised for quite a long period of time. In fact, after every training session, he felt his strength increasing in small yet noticeable increments.

Nie Yan was quite satisfied with his current body. As long as he received the proper amount of nourishment, it would rapidly transform and rise in stature— similar to how it had in the past during his senior year of high school. However, there was only one complication: the nutritional supplements he required were simply too expensive. At present, the expenses weren't something he could handle. In fact, the lowest quality nutritional supplements had a price tag of around five hundred dollars, while medium quality ones could cost upwards of several thousand. Sadly, his household carried only two portions; one of which he had already used earlier in the morning.

Finally, at five o'clock in the afternoon, Nie Yan entered the

game once more.

Upon reconnecting, he discovered a nearly endless swarm of Water Spiders skittering around him in all directions. It appeared that every single monster in the vicinity had respawned.

Fortunately, players were invulnerable for the first thirty seconds upon reconnecting. They would appear in an ethereal state as if they were a spirit. In this state, they would not only be unable to attack, but monsters would be unable to attack them as well. Nie Yan took a detour around these Water Spiders and swam away from the area where he had concealed himself.

After thirty seconds had passed, he began farming the spiders in the surrounding area once more. Currently, he had already gathered twenty-five Fine Silks and five Rare Fine Silks which came from the Water Spider Leader the day prior.

With his current hunting speed, Nie Yan estimated that it would take around three more hours for him to complete this quest.

When I return to town, I'll definitely have to make more money. That way, when I come across another gathering quest like this one, I can just buy the needed materials from the market instead. With this plan, Nie Yan would have no need to go through the tedious labour of gathering the materials himself.

Another hour passed by, and Nie Yan received a notification—it was from Yao Yao.

「Nie Yan (Nirvana Flame), where are you right now?」

「I'm still farming Water Spiders. Why, you need something?」He didn't stop killing Water Spiders, even while he chatted with Yao Yao. After activating Assassinate with his right hand, he stabbed a nearby Water Spider with his dagger. As it died, it miserably flipped over and curled up.

「My friends and I went to the Treant Forest earlier this morning.」

「Oh.」

「Huh, you're not going to ask how it went?」

「There's no need for me to ask.」Regarding this Treant Forest, Nie Yan already understood this instance quite well. In the past, it had taken him and his friends five attempts to pass the instance. If the party didn't have Warriors with at least sixty defense and two hundred and twenty health, they wouldn't stand a chance. Therefore, it would be impossible for them to clear the instance.

「Alright, it was just like you said. Our party was completely wiped. We didn't even manage to get to the Treant King. But nevermind that, one of my friends wants to meet you. We're gonna try and clear the forest again tomorrow. So... can you join us then?」

「Come back when your Fighters upgrade their defense, then we'll

talk. I'll see if I have the time by then. However, make sure you tell your friend this: In exchange for joining you guys in the Treant Forest, I want to act as the party leader. Furthermore, every single Thief item that drops will go to me.」There was a rather decent Thief cloak that dropped from the monsters within the Treant Forest, one that Nie Yan wanted.

「You want to be the party leader? Why?」

「I don't trust anyone else with leading a team.」

「This... I'll have to ask. Giving every Thief drop to you is going to be a bit difficult. After all, we have a Thief in our party as well...」Yao Yao's party was set so that drops were distributed equally among their members.

「If your team captain doesn't agree to it, then so be it.」Nie Yan really didn't want to make things awkward and difficult for Yao Yao on purpose. However, in Nie Yan's eyes, this thief in Yao Yao's party was especially unpleasant.

「I'll go ask our captain...」Nie Yan's harsh demands lowered Yao Yao's impressions of him by quite a bit.

The team captain Yao Yao spoke of was a woman named Yu Lan (Blue Feather); a Berserker. Nie Yan's first impression of this woman was her large pair of breasts. Her Berserker armour, which was tightly fitted around her body, accentuated her curves—particularly in the chest area. Moreover, the gap in her armour also exposed an extreme amount of cleavage. When he recalled this

memory of her, he couldn't help but slightly tremble.

However, Nie Yan would never dare to provoke Yu Lan. Normally, she was quite friendly and amiable; however, if someone were to irritate her, then her fiery temper would become as large as her breasts. He remembered that there was a time when another player decided to tease her. Yu Lan ended up chasing and killing that player until he dropped five levels.

It was because of such things that this beauty could only be gazed at from afar. She could neither be toyed with nor treated with disrespect. Otherwise, one would most likely find himself being the one toyed with instead.

「Also, there's one other thing... Other than the Thief equipment, I also want the jewel that the Treant King drops when it dies.」Nie Yan said without a hint of politeness or restraint.

「We all just want to try and run the dungeon together... But you...! How can you act in such a selfish way!?」Yao Yao stomped her feet and ended the call. She was furious and frustrated to the point where glistening tears began to flow from her eyes. After fighting and completing their quests together yesterday, she noticed that they actually matched each other quite well. Because of this, she felt that Nie Yan was a rather decent person and even wanted to get to know him better and befriend him. Yet she never thought that, again and again, Nie Yan would continuously crush her good impression of him that she held deep within her heart.

Nie Yan indifferently smiled. Sometimes attempting to explain was superfluous.

Yao Yao hung up the call in anger.

「Ha...」Nie Yan sighed softly. If they were to run an instance together, then it would be better to make some things clear at the start. Otherwise, when the time came, disputes would certainly arise.

At the Tellak Town transport point, Yu Lan's team had assembled together in the area. In total, there were nineteen individuals gathered together. Among them, the most conspicuous were Yu Lan, who was wearing blue armour, and Yao Yao, who was wearing a White coloured mage-robe while standing in the center.

Like the stars gathering around the moon, everyone there had gathered around, placing these two beauties at the center. Naturally, the team had other decent looking women as well. However, compared to the two beauties in the center, they could only entirely serve as the background.

With her tall curvaceous figure and long slender legs that were almost too alluring, Yu Lan had grown up to be quite a beauty. Her looks could be rated at the highest quality. Despite appearing to be only in her twenties, she gave off the full charm of an adult woman. Though the main reason for this was her large voluptuous chest that easily attracted one's eyes.

On the other hand, Yao Yao was another sort of beauty. With her whole body covered by a white robe, along with her delicate oval-

shaped face, and her hair that was tied in a ponytail, she looked pure and beautiful. Anyone who looked at her would've been moved by her charm.

“Yao Yao, what'd he say?” Yu Lan asked when she saw that Yao Yao had disconnected her voice chat.

“He said that if we're gonna go together, then he wants to be the party leader, get all the Thief equipment drops, and he also wants the jewel that drops from the Treant King!” Yao Yao's face was nearly red from anger. Originally she had been quite excited about having Nie Yan as a good friend, and introducing him to Yu Lan. Never did she expect that Nie Yan was actually that kind of person.

“Yao Yao, you're just really too naive. These kinds of people are everywhere. He's definitely just a weak liar who's trying to cheat us out of our drops,” said a Thief by her side. He was Chen Bo, a rather handsome man who appeared to be around twenty years old.

Yao Yao wanted to refute those words on Nie Yan's behalf, but after giving it a second thought, she realised that she was too angry to bother. She didn't know why, but for some reason, she still somewhat sided with Nie Yan in her heart. After all, he was actually quite strong. Not to mention that, unlike Chen Bo, she truly didn't think he was trying to scam them for equipment or anything that intolerable.

“That's not necessarily true. He already knows that the Treant King drops a jewel, which means that he's definitely gone to the Treant Forest before. Not only that but cleared it as well. The fact

that he was able to make it through the instance with a party of his own, is more than enough to prove his ability to work in a team. Moreover, he's significantly more experienced than us. So it wasn't that excessive for him to request to act as party leader, nor was it excessive for him to receive both the Thief drops and the jewel. Since he bluntly stated his demands to Yao Yao, it shows that he did so with a clear conscious clear conscience." Yu Lan patted Yao Yao's shoulders. "Yao Yao, you don't need to mind it."

After listening to Yu Lan's words, Yao Yao revealed a relieved smile. Though she was still a little angry at Nie Yan, in her heart she was already feeling significantly better.

Seeing the beautiful smiling expression on her face, Chen Bo felt his heart sink. He didn't know why, but the sudden appearance of this Nie Yan gave him a sense of foreboding.

"We'll rent a piece of Bronze-tier Fighter equipment for tomorrow. Oh yeah, make sure to tell him that we're running the instance tomorrow and that he's invited to join us," Yu Lan said. She had already begun her arrangements.

"Hmph, I'm still gonna ignore him for the rest of the morning. I'll talk to him again in the afternoon." Yao Yao pouted.

"Alright, you can contact him again in the afternoon." Yu Lan nodded while smiling.

During all this, Nie Yan continued to kill Water Spiders. His luck wasn't bad at all, considering that three Fine Silks had dropped in

succession. Looking in his bag, he already had twenty-nine of them. Only one more was needed to finish his quest.

Nevertheless, it appeared that hunting monsters early in the morning had its own benefits. For one, the drop rate for various items was comparatively higher.

After killing another Water Spider, Nie Yan reached out with his right hand to collect the loot. What'd I get? As he held up the item to get a closer look, he realized that it was a Thief skill book.

Skill Book: Lacerate

Skill Description: Thieves can use their daggers to slice into an enemy, causing them to bleed profusely. Targets hit by this attack will take bleed damage every second.

Required: Action (requires weapon)

Skill Attribute: Cuts into a target creating an open wound. Attack +1. Causes five points of bleeding every second for six seconds.

Skill Cooldown: 30 s

User Restriction: Thief, Warrior, Paladin; can be learned by any faction.

Lacerate was a Basic Skill that synergized well with Assassinate.

It could be used to follow up after Assassinate, causing additional lacerations that would make an enemy bleed for five health every second for six seconds.

However, as for its killing power... the damage from Lacerate, even including its additional bleed damage, was slightly weaker than Vital Strike. Even so, it was still a considerably decent skill.

Presently, this exact skill was what Nie Yan lacked the most.

After learning the skill, Nie Yan turned to face another a Water Spider. Suddenly he received another notification from his voice chat. This little girl... she's sending another call request.

Nie Yan answered the call. However, there was an awkward silence between the two that lingered on for what seemed like an eternity.

「You know... I originally planned to ignore you and never talk to you again. But... I'm an adult who's willing to be magnanimous, so I won't bother stooping to your level and arguing with you. My party is going to run the Treant Forest tomorrow. So are you going to come or not?」

Nie Yan couldn't help but reveal a knowing smile after imagining Yao Yao's adorable pouting expression.

「Tomorrow... I—」

「No need to explain yourself if you've other business to attend to tomorrow. Just tell me whether you're coming or not. Yes or no?」

Nie Yan was interrupted by Yao Yao just as he was about to speak.

「Alright. Just tell me the time for tomorrow, and I'll definitely be there.」 Nie Yan smiled helplessly. When it came to this little missus, he had already thoroughly given up.

「Hmm... now that sounds better. Good! We'll call you over tomorrow morning. What, are you going to be busy?」Yao Yao was quite pleased with Nie Yan's reply. She immediately hung up, not even giving him a chance to speak further.

Hmph! Little boy, we'll see if I can't discipline you, Yao Yao thought proudly to herself. When she imagined the distressed look on Nie Yan's face, she couldn't help but giggle to herself.

「[Doot! Doot!](#)」Upon hearing the sound of the call ending, Nie Yan could only smile bitterly. It seems that tomorrow I'll have to go for a run in the Treant Forest. With the distraction gone, Nie Yan continued to kill Water Spiders while steadily speeding up his pace.

After receiving the Lacerate skill, a significant increase in his hunting speed could be seen. By attacking with Assassinate and then following up with Lacerate, he was able to effortlessly kill a Water Spider.

「Ding!」A melodious jingle could be heard as a system notification rang out. Nie Yan had risen to Level 3.

After a while, he finished collecting the thirty Fine Silks.

I'm finally done. Nie Yan swam back towards the island to hand in his quest.

「System: Player Flying Stone has deposited one silver into your personal storage.」

「Expert, the strategy you provided us with was really useful! Thanks to it, we've managed clear the Fallen Shaman Camp. As such, the other silver has already been deposited into your storage.」Stone informed Nie Yan in excitement.

「I've received it. Is there anything else you need?」With the two silvers from Stone plus his recent earnings, he had almost three silvers. With this, he could be considered to have some capital.

「One of my friends said that they're gonna form a party to hunt in the Agmota Muddy Wetlands the day after tomorrow. Do you wanna come?」Stone asked with a hint of expectation.

「I'm going to be busy the day after tomorrow.」The Agmota Muddy Wetlands was a somewhat difficult instance. Though seeing as Stone's party was able to clear the Fallen Shaman Camp, it seemed like their strength wasn't too bad.

「Ah... nevermind then. Expert, would you happen to have a guide for the Agmota Muddy Wetlands as well...?」

「Ahhh...!? Do you think I'm some kind of god? Agmota Muddy Wetlands is the most difficult Level 3 instance. You think I'm able to make up a guide for it so quickly?」He couldn't keep offering to sell guides for dungeon instances. Otherwise, he'd end up attracting too much suspicion from others. Besides, it would be better for him to wait for a good offer, which would inevitably come after Stone and his team were wiped during their first few attempts.

「Ah. I'm sorry. I was just thinking out of habit... haha.」Stone laughed in embarrassment.

Chapter 18 – Hidden Quest

Nie Yan and Stone briefly exchanged a few more words before hanging up the call. By this time, he had already arrived back at the island. There, he found Physician Blevins still fishing by the lakeshore.

“Youngster! How many bundles of Fine Silk did you manage to collect?” Physician Plevins asked after seeing that Nie Yan had returned.

“Esteemed Senior, here are the thirty bundles of Fine Silk I’ve gathered. I’d like to request that Senior have a look,” Nie Yan replied in a polite and formal tone that was standard when turning in quests.

“Youngster, I must thank you for your generosity. Please take these thirty Silk Cloths with you as a means to repay your kindness. Furthermore, I have also decided to impart upon you a skill.”

「System: Physician Blevins wishes to teach you Intermediate Combat Medic. Will you learn it?」

Nie Yan felt his heart skip a beat. This was exactly the skill he wanted to learn. Without showing the slightest hint of hesitation, he immediately hit accept.

「System: The Great Mage, Blevins, has taught you a skill. You have learned Intermediate Combat Medic.」

Intermediate Combat Medic: Allows the player to create and use Intermediate Combat Bandages while in combat. Requires 10 Silk Cloth. Each bandage replenishes 20 health every second for 10 seconds. Healing can be interrupted after 3 seconds of applying bandages. Bandages can also be used on other party members.

Ten silk cloths were equivalent to twenty coppers. Although it was a tad expensive, this was still a skill that could save lives in a moment of crisis!

「System: The task Physician Blevins has entrusted you with is 20% complete.」

Nie Yan stared blankly at this notification. Reasonably enough, he believed that the quest would have ended after handing in the thirty Fine Silks, but reality proved otherwise. What the hell? Why is it only twenty percent complete?

“Youngster, thirty bundles of Fine Silk is still far from being enough. I still need much more. Would you be willing to help me find more?”

“I’m willing to aid you in your task,” Nie Yan hurriedly replied. It appeared that the Combat Medic Skill was merely one of the rewards in this lengthy quest. He was clueless as to what other quest rewards would lie further ahead. “Esteemed Senior. Here are five Rare Fine Silks that I’d chanced upon, though I am unsure of their usefulness.”

“Fine Silk becomes Rare Fine Silk after it has undergone processing. Each bundle of Rare Fine Silk is equivalent to six bundles of common Fine Silk,” the Old Man explained to Nie Yan. Afterwards, the Old Man inquired further, “So youngster, are you willing to give them to me?”

“Yes,” Nie Yan replied. Five Rare Fine Silks were equivalent to thirty ordinary Fine Silks. He had been killing Water Spiders for so long, yet he never once thought to hunt Water Spider Leaders despite them giving better drops.

However, this was to be expected, as killing a Leader-ranked Water Spider was truly too dangerous of a task. In any case, it wasn't something Nie Yan could simply accomplish by himself.

「System: You've received 30 Silk Cloths.」

「System: You've received Headhunter's Silver Leather Armour.」

「System: The task Physician Blevins has entrusted you with is 40% complete.」

Nie Yan felt a pleasant surprise after reading the second system announcement. After opening his bag, he found a silver-coloured piece of armour within his inventory.

Who knew what kind of animal hide was used to make this piece of leather armour. It was tough, durable, and radiated a silver-white lustre. Furthermore, it didn't need to be appraised.

Let's take a look at its properties.

Headhunter's Silver Leather Armour (Silver)

Level Requirement: Level 5

Properties: Defense 13–17, Strength +5, Dexterity +5

Weight: 3 lb

User Restriction: Thief, Paladin, can only be equipped by the Righteous faction who protects the light.

The properties of Silver-grade equipment were at least thirty percent higher than normal equipment. Furthermore, they also included two additional properties. With current market prices, Nie Yan estimated that he could sell this piece of armour for at least five silvers if he put it up in the auction house.

Nie Yan's equipment would improve significantly upon reaching level 5, as he would finally be able to replace his current equipment with the Horn Dagger and Headhunter's Silver Leather Armour.

With these thoughts in mind, he suddenly felt more motivation to level up.

This Old Man sure is generous with his quest rewards, and sixty percent of the quest still remains unfinished. If I try to farm ninety more Fine Silks myself though... I'd end up working myself to death! I'll just spend some money to buy the materials off the auction house instead. Ninety Fine Silks... that would be about three silvers. Ah... looking at it this way, I'm still a long ways off

from having enough money to spend freely.

How can I make some money fast? Nie Yan was trying to rack his brain for a solution to this difficult problem. Eventually, he remembered a certain online guide that he viewed in the past.

It was then that Nie Yan had a sudden flash of insight. Back when the game was first released, the most worthless item in the game was a drop by the name of Bat Teeth. It was a material used for crafting Level 0 beginner weapons. Even more laughable, these weapons would come out with pitifully low attack. Thus, for the most part, no one, aside from the occasional player who would purchase a few to level up their Blacksmithing after learning the skill, would buy the Bat Teeth. Other than that, there were just no other players who would bother buying any. Not to mention even if you sold five stacks of them—a hundred bat teeth—to an NPC, you would only receive a single copper. For these reasons, there were quite a few Bat Teeth littered across the ground in the Level 3 Bat spawning area, as few would bother picking them up.

Many players would rather throw them away than have this trash material take up space in their bag. As a result, only the poorest of players would bother picking them up and selling them to the NPC stores.

Nie Yan, however, knew these Bat Teeth had another use. They could be given to a high-level blacksmith in Calore city after triggering his hidden quest. In exchange for ten Bat Teeth—half of a full stack—you would receive a little bit of experience and one copper. Furthermore, you could exchange an unlimited amount of Bat Teeth with this blacksmith. As more and more players

discovered this blacksmith, the market price for these Bat Teeth rose accordingly.

This sort of business is actually doable... Nie Yan couldn't help but have this thought. All he needed to do was head to the Level 3 Bat spawn area and advertise that he's buying a stack of Bat Teeth for one copper. He'd soon have a massive amount of Bat Teeth delivered right to his doorstep. Afterwards, he could exchange all of them with that blacksmith in Calore city and receive his quest reward. This way he could make a profit while also leveling up at the same time. How could he have forgotten something like this!?

Nie Yan no longer hesitated and immediately ran off towards Tellak town. After returning to the town, he retrieved his two silvers from the storage, threw all his unwanted equipment up in the auction house, and then finally went to the appraiser to appraise the Soft Leather Gloves that he looted from the Golden Electric Eel. The gloves ended up being a Level 0 equipment with an additional property of Dexterity +2.

The properties were fairly decent for Level 0 equipment. Nie Yan put the gloves on; they were the first piece of Bronze-grade equipment that he could actually equip.

The gloves radiated a faint cyan glow until Nie Yan turned off the visual effects in equipment settings. It was still best if he kept a low profile. If his equipment was too conspicuous, then he would very likely be followed after leaving the city. After finishing up his business in town, Nie Yan went through the transport point to Calore city. From there he went directly to the Kade Smithy within the city center.

Calore city housed over sixty smithies that offered various blacksmithing services. You could buy everything from large siege equipment to weapons, armour, and even horseshoes. Only the Kade Smithy differed from this norm. Of all the smithies in the city, it was the most unremarkable.

It was the high-level blacksmith, Kade, who issued the quest to gather Bat Teeth. In his former life, the player who first discovered it was a Paladin. After discovering that this blacksmith, Kade, gave out such a quest, he immediately bought a large amount of Bat Teeth and exchanged them with Kade for a large amount of profit and experience. He wanted to keep this his own secret, so he worked especially low key. However, as this Paladin purchased an increasingly large amount of Bat Teeth, other players began to grow suspicious. What could this Paladin possibly need so many Bat Teeth for? Afterwards, a Thief ended up shadowing him to the Kade Smithy, and the secret became publicized. However, by that time, most players were already over Level 10. The price of Bat Teeth had increased, and no players were willing to sell them for a low price now. It already wasn't worth it for them to go back to the area and farm Bat Teeth for the quest. When those Level 10 players recalled all the Bat Teeth they threw away in the past, they could only helplessly shake their heads and sigh. As for the Paladin who had first discovered this hidden quest, he had already earned overflowing basins full of money from doing this quest in secret for such a long time.

However, at present... the only person who knew of this hidden quest was Nie Yan and Nie Yan alone!

Nie Yan entered the Kade Smithy. Its shopfront was extremely

narrow, nevertheless, it was still one of the many smithies designated by the Viridian Empire Military.

As Nie Yan entered the smithy, he saw an NPC apprentice blacksmith.

“Dear customer, may I ask if there is anything you require?” the Apprentice came up and asked.

“I’m looking for Mister Kade.”

“I’m sorry, but my master has already gone out,” the Apprentice replied apologetically.

“I have some business with him. May I ask when he’ll be back?” The Apprentice’s reply came as no surprise. This was precisely how the hidden quest was triggered.

“May I ask what business you have with my master? I can pass along a message.” The Apprentice sized up Nie Yan, a sharp expression filling his eyes.

“Please let Mister Kade know that I can help him with the current problem he’s facing.”

“Please wait a moment!” The Apprentice hastily ran out the door.

After a while, the Smithing Apprentice came back with a tall and

sturdy-looking blacksmith in his middle ages. He had messy sideburns, and his upper body was completely bare. His whole body was robust and covered in muscles from head to toe. Not only that, but his skin had also turned a dark shade of red after being exposed to the heat of a blazing furnace all year round.

“Mister Blacksmith, rumours say you’ve met with some worrisome troubles. May I ask what they might be? Perhaps I might be able to help you out,” Nie Yan said and then thought to himself, There should be no problems with my wording here...

‘Coming this autumn, the situation in Hilton Stronghold will become more and more intense. We need much more weapons in order to meet the demands of the soldiers on the frontlines. I need materials—a great amount of them. And at present, I’m clueless as to how I can amass such a large amount of these materials...’ Blacksmith Kade said in a distressed manner.

“May I inquire what kind of materials you need? Perhaps I can help you find them.”

“I need a large quantity of Bat Teeth. I’m willing to purchase a stack for two coppers if you have them,” Blacksmith Kade replied. For Kade, these Bat Teeth were crucial materials he was in desperate need of.

NPCs didn’t have much intelligence; they simply followed the instructions given by the main system A.I. They could only issue and receive quests. Hidden NPCs like Blacksmith Kade would not announce their quest publically.

「System: Do you wish to accept Blacksmith Kade's request?」

Yes!

「System: You have accepted Blacksmith Kade's request.」

“Please be at ease. I will definitely help you find these materials.” Nie Yan reassured Blacksmith Kade, then went through a transport point to the town of Mordor.

There was a large expanse near Mordor where a large amount of Level 3 Bat monsters congregated.

With about several hundred people in it, the town was quite crowded.

“Recruiting people Level 3 or higher for Level 3 Instance, Warriors Tomb. I'm a Mage that deals over thirty magic damage!”

“Recruiting people to hunt bats! I'm a Level 3 Fire Elementalist!”

Players were looking to form parties. Some would end up joining parties, while others would be buzzing around like houseflies. Those who had good equipment would often have an easy time finding a party to join. Meanwhile, those with poor equipment would find themselves being ignored by most parties.

Parties formed one after another and left the town.

It was currently early morning in the game. Once players formed a party, they would farm monsters for the whole day, only disbanding late in the evening.

Nie Yan had set up a booth near the player storehouse. There he put up a sign that read: 'Buying Bat Teeth. One stack for one copper.'

He had just put up the sign, yet there were already many players gathering around him. Many of them always hung around this area hunting Bats, thus their bags were filled with many Bat Teeth. Once they gathered a hundred of them, they would go back and sell them to the NPCs. One copper wasn't much, but no matter how insignificant the amount was, it was still money. Besides, Nie Yan buying Bat Teeth for one copper per stack was a much better deal than selling the materials to an NPC.

The players thought, Huh? These Bat Teeth litter the ground everywhere. I can actually sell a garbage drop like this for such a high price? Doing the math, I can make a decent profit selling these Bat Teeth.

The everyday income for the average players wasn't very high. Add on their need to purchase equipment and healing items, most players would only have ten or twenty coppers on them at most. Naturally, they were all very willing when they learned that they could make a few extra coppers off of Nie Yan.

“Hey, brother! I have three stacks of Bat Teeth here. Do you want them?”

“Of course. If you have any, I’ll take them,” Nie Yan said while nodding his head. After briefly sweeping a glance at the ten or so people circling around him, he noticed that five or six of them were already organizing their inventories. Several others were hastily opening up their personal storages, fearful that Nie Yan had collected enough Bat Teeth and no longer wanted any more.

“What are these Bat Teeth used for?” Some players probed and asked.

“I’m using them to level up my Beginner Blacksmithing skill,” Nie Yan would reply.

“How does leveling up the Beginner Blacksmithing skill require so many Bat Teeth?”

“I have ten or so friends who are all learning Blacksmithing as well, and they’re having me buy the materials all at once. If you’re going to sell then sell already. If you’re not, then stop standing around and blocking the line,” Nie Yan replied indifferently.

“Here, I have two stacks.”

Nie Yan glanced at the trade window. He put in two coppers and then hit confirm.

“Here are mine. There are three stacks.”

One after another, players continuously made trades with Nie Yan. Those who had more would sell around three or four stacks. While those with less would sell only one or two stacks. There were even a few who hadn't traded anything; they stood off to the side and gazed helplessly. They were the ones who had either already sold all their Bat Teeth to the NPCs, or thrown them away. In either case, they all stood there filled with regret.

While trading, Nie Yan was also depositing the Bat Teeth into his personal storage. His bag only had twenty slots, and simply didn't have enough space to hold all the materials.

More and more people came to trade with Nie Yan. The players who had sold their Bat Teeth would pass this information onto their friends. Then those friends who had Bat Teeth would come over one after another, bringing their Bat Teeth with them.

Before long, Nie Yan had collected over two hundred stacks of Bat Teeth.

Nie Yan hurriedly made an announcement. “Everyone, please wait a moment! All of you, please wait! I'm already out of money. Let me get some more money from my friends first. I'll be back in just a moment—fifteen minutes at most. Everyone, please come back after fifteen minutes, I'll be back here by then.”

“I still have some here!”

“Wait! There’s mine too!”

Nie Yan pushed through the crowd as he walked out. Finally, he took a deep breath. “Hah... these players are way too enthusiastic...”

Chapter 19 – [New Money](#)

Nie Yan arrived back at Calore city after passing through the transport point. As soon as he arrived, he turned a corner and entered a nearby alleyway. There he activated Stealth after making sure no one was following him. Only after making seven or eight detours through the alleyways, did he finally arrive at the Kade Smithy.

This was a lesson learned from the past. He definitely wouldn't allow the location of the Kade Smithy to be disclosed.

Nie Yan would retrieve the Bat Teeth he had collected from the other player in batches, then transport and sell them to Kade.

A while later, over two hundred stacks of teeth were sold for four silvers. Two silvers had become four in only half an hour. In addition, he also gained nine hundred experience. Nie Yan noticed his experience bar had already risen to five percent when he glanced at it.

He went back to Mordor after handing over all the Bat Teeth, and continued buying more.

Those players who saw Nie Yan return, fearful that he might soon leave again, immediately lined up and waited to trade.

Mordor was bustling with an unusually high amount of activity due to Nie Yan's actions.

“Everyone, there’s no need to feel anxious. After I buy everything I need this morning, I’ll be coming back around eight in the evening to buy some more.” Nie Yan issued an announcement to the crowd. These players would most likely amass quite a few Bat Teeth after farming monsters for the whole day up till eight in the evening.

By the time he had purchased over two hundred stacks, the amount of Bat Teeth being traded had gradually lessened. After purchasing another one hundred stacks, Nie Yan saw there were no more players coming to trade. Thus he went through the transport point back to Calore city.

Two Thieves were following him closely. Nie Yan had bought these Bat Teeth all in one go, yet he still had the appearance of someone who looked like they still hadn’t had enough. With that sort of behavior, trying not to attract the suspicion of others was difficult in itself.

Nie Yan’s mouth curved into a faint smile when he detected these Thieves attempting to track him. At present, those who were able to track him... haven’t even been born yet!

Nie Yan turned a corner into an alleyway and activated Stealth, very quickly disappearing from sight.

By the time those Thieves made their way over to the alleyway, all traces of Nie Yan were gone.

“Where’d that guy go?”

“I can’t find him.”

“Brother, what do you think that guy’s gonna do with all the Bat Teeth he bought?”

“Who the hell knows... It definitely isn’t for leveling his Blacksmithing though, that’s for certain. There’s no way in hell Blacksmithing would take that many Bat Teeth to level up, even if he’s buying them for his friends. Not to mention he’s even coming back for more in the evening. Let’s wait until next time.”

Those two Thieves who stood at the corner spoke a few more words, then turned around and left.

Gradually, a silhouette emerged from a wall not far from where those two Thieves had been. It was Nie Yan coming out of Stealth. He had been just two meters away from them at most, yet they hadn’t detected anything in the slightest.

Nie Yan smiled coldly as he gazed at the backs of their retreating figures. It was simply wishful thinking, believing that they could pry into his secret. He wouldn’t be so stupid as to reveal Blacksmith Kade’s location. He turned around and went further into the alleyway.

Having exchanged all three hundred stacks of Bat Teeth with Kade, Nie Yan now had seven silvers in his pockets. With the

current average level of the player base, this could be considered a massive sum of money.

He then ran to Carter town and Yeme town to purchase more Bat Teeth. After exchanging them with Kade, he had a total of twenty-six silvers.

He now understood what it felt like to be rolling in money.

“Ahh... how refreshing.”

The amount of money a player had early in the game was essential to their growth in the future.

That Paladin from his past life had made over ten gold coins from this quest. Earning such an amount seemed inconceivable to him when he first entered the game, but now he knew it was possible firsthand. Those players who knew about Nie Yan buying Bat Teeth for a high price would never imagine he was selling them to an NPC. Thus he would be able to make even more money down the road!

A person's confidence would change when they had money, and Nie Yan was no exception. He immediately went off to the largest auction house in Calore city. The equipment and weapons being auctioned there were all at least Bronze-grade or higher. In addition, there were also various uncommon skill books and materials being auctioned off as well. For the most part, players who traded here were those who would often partake in raids.

While on his way to the auction house, Nie Yan decided in advance that he would buy ninety Fine Silks at the lowest possible price. After making the purchase, he deposited his new materials into storage, so he could retrieve them whenever he wanted to hand in his quest. Afterwards, he strolled into the large hall of the auction house.

As expected of the largest auction house in Calore, its construction was quite grand. The pillars within the main hall were built to be dozens of meters high to support the immense roof. The entire length of the hall spanned over a hundred meters. It was as if it was the hall of some vast temple or shrine.

Nie Yan had routinely walked through these halls in his former life. After finding a corner to sit down at, he picked up his bidding device and marked down the quoted prices of the various merchandise that would appear on the magic screen.

He look at page after page of merchandise. Everything listed on the magic screen was separated into categories, making it easy for players to find a specific item they were searching for.

Nie Yan unchecked all the categories that were of no use to him. All that remained on the screen were items that could used by all professions, such as defensive daggers, small round shields, bags, etc...

Player could equip up to five bags. They were divided into slots of sixteen, twenty, twenty-four, twenty-eight, and so on. The larger the bag space, the higher the price.

Each player would be given a starter bag with twenty slots when they began the game. If they wanted more bag space, they could buy a sixteen-slot bag from the market place for ten coppers. As for twenty slot bags... their prices were even higher. Though at any rate, money wasn't really an issue for Nie Yan at the moment.

Money spent could still be earned back in the future. In reality, the real loss was letting it waste away in your pockets.

Nie Yan was using this money to outfit himself with the best equipment.

The auction house had no more than eleven twenty-slot bags up for auction, each one being auctioned off for around twenty coppers. Nie Yan placed bids on four of these twenty-slot bags.

Although the price of the bags Nie Yan bid on gradually rose, his maximum bid never exceeded twenty-two coppers. Before long, he managed to secure four twenty-slot bags.

God dammit... tailors are the ones that make the real money, Nie Yan couldn't help but think to himself. However it was necessary to have the right connections if one wanted to be successful in a crafting profession. For example, a player could be at ease leveling their crafting skill if they had a guild to rely on and have the guild supply them with an endless amount of materials. Tailors were like this as well. And although many normal players would learn a crafting skill as well, they couldn't compare to those players who specialized in their crafting skill.

Nie Yan's need for money still hadn't degenerated to the point where he needed to become a player that specialized in crafting.

After spending half a silver, he opened up a page that was exclusively for Thief merchandise.

He skimmed through the page, searching for anything that looked interesting. As long as the item was useful, he would buy it without the slightest hint of hesitation. It didn't matter if the item was a little overpriced, he would still purchase it regardless.

The items he bought were all Bronze-grade; a pair of Soft Leather Pants with Dexterity +3, a set of Azure Fur Armour with Strength +2, a pair of Horsehide Boots with Balance +2, and a Silver-tip Dagger with Strength +3. Nie Yan had spent a hefty sum purchasing these four pieces of Level 0 equipment. After replacing his current equipment with his new gear, he was now wearing only Bronze-grade equipment. Any one of these four pieces of equipment would cost a fortune for the average player. If it wasn't for him taking advantage of Kade's hidden quest to make a profit, he definitely wouldn't have dared to spend so much money.

Nie Yan glanced at his equip load after replacing his equipment—16 lb. His weight was still classified as a “[Light Load](#)” (0–20 lb), thus his movements wouldn't be hindered at all.

In addition to those four pieces of equipment, Nie Yan also bought three Thief skill books. The first was the passive skill, Enhance Stealth: Stealth and Cloak receive an additional bonus of

+3. The second book taught an attack skill called Concussive Blow: Directly strike an opponent, confusing them and preventing movement for three seconds. This skill has a cooldown of thirty seconds. Finally, the third book taught a skill called Smothering Strike: Strike an enemy from behind, putting them in a confused state for six seconds. Target will awaken from confusion if attacked. This skill has a cooldown of thirty seconds.

These three skill books taught only Level 0 Thief skills, however the market price for them was roughly twenty coppers each. Thieves would be very poor when first starting out in the game. In that respect, Thieves and Mages could be considered fellow sufferers in the same boat, as both professions would end up spending practically all their wealth buying skill books!

Thieves were a profession that couldn't survive without skills, but each skill book was quite expensive! Thus they had no choice but to bear through the hard times, living frugally each day so they could purchase a single skill book. Sometimes these players would even be forced to continue wearing their old worn out equipment, just so that they could save a few coppers. Even the Thief players who were somewhat wealthy in real life would sometimes have no choice but to head to the transaction platforms and spend some money to buy in-game currency.

A Thief's true power, their formidable ability to control a fight, would only emerge if a player could endure through these hard times and buy the skills they needed.

Nie Yan had also endured these hardships before, slowly making his way up bit by bit before being reincarnated. Though he was

able to easily buy his way through this barrier in his current life.

His skill bar looked that much less empty after learning those three skills. He pulled up the page for skill books again to see if there were any other skills up for sale. As he browsed, the name of an uncommon skill caught his eye.

Skill Book: Parry

Skill Description: Parry an opponent's attack with your weapon.

Required: Action (requires weapon)

Skill Cooldown: 30 s

User Restriction: Thief, Warrior, Paladin; can be learned by any faction.

Nie Yan couldn't forget this skill. It was something that every close combat profession yearned for—the most valuable asset of any melee profession. It didn't matter what kind of situation a player was in, whether PvPing or fighting a monster, being able to parry an attack was a lifesaver.

Parry was a skill that had a one in ten thousand chance of dropping from demonic monsters.

Only one or two players had learned the skill when he

participated in a hundred man battle full of Level 60s in the past. This exemplified how rare of a skill it was. Its value was only slightly less than the skill book for Vital Strike.

It didn't matter though... he would buy it anyway!

Nie Yan glanced at the current bid—two silvers. Not only that but the bidding price was constantly rising by at least fifty coppers each time.

The ones who made bids on these uncommon and rare skills were usually wealthy players, teams, or maybe even guild leaders. More often times than not, they wouldn't mind spending a few silvers for the sake of a single skill book.

Two silvers and fifty coppers, three silvers, three silvers and fifty coppers...

The fierce bidding on the Parry skill book attracted the attention of many players.

“It's a rare skill!”

“No wonder the bids are so high...”

Three silvers... it was roughly the same amount that a team would make after clearing a common Level 3 dungeon. Even then the most they could earn would be five silvers.

After a short while, the bidding came to a halt. The auctioned item would go to the highest bidder if ten minutes passed without any further bids.

“Four silvers...” Nie Yan placed his bid. He was determined to get this Parry skill book.

“Four silvers and fifty coppers!?” He didn’t know who, but someone increased the bid yet again.

This price could terrify the overwhelming majority of players in the game.

At this moment, it was simply a matter of which side was more willing to throw their money away. “Five silvers!” Nie Yan increased his bid once more... No matter what he’d still have many more opportunities to earn money in the future. This amount wasn’t something he’d be lacking in the slightest.

“God damn. Who the hell is that rich? To spend that much money for a single Parry skill book...”

All of the players at the auction were already discussing it in private. A single Thief skill book being auctioned for such a price... This was just too terrifying.

“There truly are a lot of wealthy people.”

The price didn't increase for a while. It seemed the other party had been scared off by Nie Yan's bid. The Parry skill book entered his bag after ten minutes passed.

After learning the skill, he bought a vial of poison used by Thieves to coat their daggers for thirty coppers. It could be applied three times before running out, and would cause an enemy to lose ten percent of their defense after being poisoned.

Finally he was done purchasing everything he needed. Furthermore, the items he had auctioned earlier had been sold. Currently he still had sixteen silvers remaining in his pockets.

Despite having learned so many new skills, Nie Yan didn't need to practice with them at all. This was because he was highly familiar with both the Thief Skills and the profession itself. He could use these skills with ease right off the bat, thus his strength had increased significantly after learning them.

Nie Yan now had a lot more confidence when comparing himself to those who had started when the game first released. Using the game knowledge of his past life, he could now pave a path for his future development. Then in the future he could walk down this path unobstructed.

Afterwards he crafted the Silk Cloths in his bag into bandages, which could be used in case of emergency. He also bought bread and other useful items that could replenish his strength. Furthermore he now had a bag full of Basic Health Potions and Basic Recovery Potions.

Intermediate Combat Medic: Skill Mastery 10/500

Should I head off and level then? Nie Yan immediately thought of several leveling locations that were very suited for Thieves to train in.

Chapter 20 – Killing A Red Named Player

I suppose I'll check Spiritmyth Pond first. There should be a few treasure chests there, not to mention the drops aren't too bad either. Though I don't know whether or not the chests have already been found by someone else. 「Ding!」 While contemplating this matter, Nie Yan suddenly received a notification.

「System: Player Yao Zi (Young Sparrow Hawk) has sent you a friend request.」

「Nie Yan, it's me,」Tang Yao said in an anxious tone.

「What's the matter?」Nie Yan asked. The anxiousness in Tang Yao's tone caused him to furrow his brows.

「I've been cornered at Levin Hills,」Tang Yao said depressingly. The only person he could think of who could help him out at this moment was Nie Yan.

「What, who's got you cornered?」

「People from the Radiant Sacred Flame guild. There's at least twenty of them! All five of my teammates were killed by those bastards. Only I alone managed to escape... If it wasn't for Lei Zi (Young Thunder) shielding me, then I would've died as well. Right now those guys are blocking the only two exits from Levin Hills.」Lei Zi was Nie Yan and Tang Yao's classmate in middle school. However, unlike Tang Yao, he wasn't very close to Nie Yan, as they had only made brief contact in the past.

Radiant Sacred Flame... Nie Yan had actually heard of this guild before. It was a large guild, similar to Victorious Return. In the past, around the time he had reached Level 60, Conviction's developers implemented the guild ranking system. Radiant Sacred Flame was one of the guilds that had ranked in the top sixties. Even as the years went by they never fell below the top one hundred.

"Hide well. I'll be there in just a moment," Nie Yan advised. Tang Yao would very likely be killed if he was late by even a few moments. Dying meant the loss of a level. This would be an extremely unfortunate outcome for Tang Yao.

Nie Yan entered a scroll shop and bought five Return Scrolls, five Basic Haste Scrolls, and five Basic Strength Scrolls. He only needed to give Tang Yao a Return Scroll and the latter would be able to be safely teleported to the nearest city or town. As for the other scrolls, he prepared them in case he needed them later on.

A single Return Scroll would cost upwards of thirty coppers. As for the Basic Haste and Strength Scrolls, they were slightly cheaper at twenty coppers each. Both these scrolls had a duration of thirty seconds. Basic Haste Scrolls would increase movement speed by twenty percent, whereas Basic Strength Scrolls would increase strength by five points.

For players who weren't so wealthy, these scrolls were items that many of them couldn't bear to use. No one would dare act like Nie Yan and buy this many scrolls in one go.

He also bought more Basic Health Potions in preparation for the future.

Nie Yan put away the scrolls and hastily made his way towards the nearest transport point. He was equipped with Bronze-grade equipment that gave stat bonuses such as Dexterity +5 and Move Speed +2. As a result, his current movement speed vastly outstripped the average player.

He quickly arrived at the transport point and teleported straight to Link town. After emerging in the town, he immediately sprinted off towards the north.

「How'd you guys get into a scuffle with them in the first place?」

「We met a Leader-class monster in the area where we were hunting Level 3 mobs. While we were fighting it, a group of people came over and tried to forcefully steal the kill from us, just because they had the advantage in numbers. In the end, our party's Thief managed to grab a piece of Bronze equipment when the Leader-class monster died. Those guys weren't willing to accept that, though, so they tried to kill us afterwards. Now three of them have their names marked red.」Tang Yao seemed to be out of breath while he said all this. It appeared that he was still hiding from his pursuers.

「How much longer do you think you can hold out for?」

「Luckily, Levin Hills is a pretty wide area. So as long as I keep moving around, they shouldn't even think about catching me

within the next hour, especially considering how few people they have. That is... unless they call for more reinforcements.」

「One hour is enough. I'll make sure to thoroughly have fun with them.」Nie Yan was beginning to grow restless. He was equipped from head to toe with Bronze-grade equipment and had learnt many new skills. He was just itching to go, now that he had found new opponents to test them out on.

「What're you gonna do?」

「This brother is going to vent some frustrations on your behalf,」Nie Yan confidently replied.

「How many people do you have with you?」Tang Yao asked, bewildered. He couldn't help but wonder if Nie Yan actually managed to bring a lot of people with him.

「None, just me.」

「Is this some kind of joke!?」Tang Yao felt this was simply too ridiculous.

「Haha! What do you think?」Nie Yan replied. At present, most players in the game weren't that strong. After all, they've only been playing the game for about a week. To put it simply, they were all still novices. Even guilds like Radiant Sacred Flame would be hard pressed to find even a single member that could rival Nie Yan, let alone having the bottom ranking runts facing him.「I can't

wipe them all out, but taking care of a few of them shouldn't be a problem.」

Nie Yan had ten years of experience playing a Thief. He knew all the skills used by each and every profession for PvP. Not to mention he understood combat strategies like the back of his hand. Even if they have more people... so what?

「Don't go getting yourself killed, though. If the situation starts looking dangerous and you can't help me, then so be it. Even if I die, I'll only lose one level. It's nothing to lose your head over.」

「No worries. Find a place to hide and don't come out. Just sit back and watch.」

The entrance to Levin Hills was a small ravine that allowed only three to four people to pass through at a time. Steep vertical cliff faces flanked the ravine on both sides.

There were three players guarding this entrance: a Level 3 Berserker, a Level 3 Elementalist, and a Level 2 Priest.

Among the three, only the Elementalist had their name marked red.

Their companions had already gone in to chase after Tang Yao, leaving only these three to guard the entrance.

And the hapless Tang Yao was trapped inside, just like a turtle in

a jar.

“Damn! That bastard is as slippery as a loach. Even after all this, we still haven’t managed to catch him. What’s worse is that I don’t even know when this red mark on my name is going to disappear. I can’t even enter any towns or cities until it goes away,” the Elementalist cursed while chatting with his teammates.

“Captain Dian Cang (Blue Drop), don’t be angry. There’s no problem as long as you don’t get killed by someone before your red name disappears. Besides, we gained a lot of profit from this. Each of those five people we killed dropped a piece of equipment,” the Berserker consoled.

“Peh! Those five pieces of garbage aren’t worth ass. If it weren’t for those brats thinking they could actually steal our equipment, putting me in a shitty mood, then this old man wouldn’t even have bothered with them.” the Elementalist named Dian Cang replied disdainfully.

“Captain Dian Cang you’re truly like an invincible god. You managed to single-handedly take out three of them by yourself. Remember when you cast Scorching Flame Explosion earlier? The way you used it was simply too exquisite!” the Priest next to him began flattering and fawning.

“Hmph! Those three were just weak. It only took one Scorching Flame Explosion to take out over half of their health. If it weren’t for their small amount of magic resistance, they surely wouldn’t have survived!” Dian Cang said, somewhat pleased with himself.

The nearby Berserker and Priest were simply followers of this ill-tempered Elementalist. It seemed that his position within the Radiant Sacred Flame guild was rather high.

The three chatted on idly like this.

“Ah! A red name. Looks like today’s meal will be rather decent.” Nie Yan cackled with a strange laugh while hiding far off in the distance. If a player with their name marked in bright red like this Elementalist were to be killed, then not a single a piece of equipment on their body would remain. Everything equipped would drop!

Furthermore, the equipment this Elementalist donned didn’t look half-bad. He wore a blazing red mage gown that resembled flowing flames. He held in his hands a dark crimson redwood mage staff with a fiery blaze that circulated at the top. It appeared to be a part of the Fire Chaser set, but Nie Yan himself wasn’t too sure.

This Elementalist was going down a route that focused on fire damage. The high damage from his fire spells was going to be a slight pain to deal with. The nearby Berserker also looked like he would be hard to handle. As for the Priest by their side, he could simply be ignored. Most priests still haven’t even learned Heal this early in the game. Therefore, they would just follow the team from behind and leech experience.

Dian Cang swept his eyes over the surroundings. The steep inclines of the nearby mountains made the background slightly

difficult to blend into. However, Nie Yan had learned the Enhance Stealth passive skill, so it wouldn't be much of a problem.

He entered Stealth and slowly moved towards those three players.

He grasped the dagger in his right hand, holding it in a reverse grip, and slowly crept closer. At about five meters away, he was able to clearly make out the expressions on each of their faces.

The Elementalist Dian Cang felt something peculiar and glanced over the nearby area. Seeing this, Nie Yan quickly halted his steps and exercised control over his breathing. Seems this Elementalist has a rather high [Awareness](#).

“Captain Dian Cang, what's wrong?” the Berserker asked with a bewildered expression. He looked around, but all he saw was empty space.

Dian Cang searched the surroundings once more with a more focused gaze, but still didn't discover anything. He shook his head and said, “Nothing, probably just my imagination.”

Nie Yan faintly knitted his brows. He could tell this Dian Cang was experienced in PKing, because he was able to vaguely sense Nie Yan's presence from such a far distance.

The more points a player had in Awareness, the easier it would be for them to detect hidden enemies such as Thieves.

I can't take my opponents too lightly. Nie Yan inwardly reminded himself. Numerous bitter experiences in the past reminded him that underestimating an opponent would often lead to defeat.

Nie Yan lightly tread forward, occasionally altering his walking speed. After calming his mind, he gradually entered a Thief's stealthing state, and completely merged with the background.

"Captain Dian Cang, who knows where that Arcane Mage could be hiding up in the hills. Maybe Bai Mao (White Hair) and the others have already lost him," the Berserker said after taking a quick glance at Dian Cang's expression.

"Oh," Dian Cang absent-mindedly replied.

"That brat is pretty cunning. He nearly killed Dong Zi (East Child) just now," the Priest informed after looking at the party chat.

"Mhmm... his defense is too weak," Dian Cang answered back. He seemed preoccupied with something else.

The Berserker and Priest were quite puzzled. What's going on with the Captain? Why is he so absent-minded?

By this time, Nie Yan had made his way behind Dian Cang, and was unable to see the expression on the latter's face.

He was now only two meters away from Dian Cang. Nie Yan attentively gazed at his target's back. After making some quick measurements, he found that he was about three meters away from the other two. It's about time. He resembled a cheetah as he patiently stored up power in his legs before suddenly pouncing towards his target—Dian Cang!

“Brat! I was waiting for you to show yourself!” Dian Cang laughed sinisterly. He retreated back and brandished the staff in his hand. “Fierce Flame Ring!”

He had discovered Nie Yan long ago! His eight points of Awareness weren't something to be trifled with.

Even if they were stealthed, it would still be incredibly difficult for a Thief to leave behind no traces in front of an expert.

The Elementalist had intended to lure Nie Yan closer so he could kill him with the help of the nearby Berserker and Priest!

“You took a fancy to this old man's equipment? Do you think you'll still have a life to snatch it with?” Dian Cang smiled disdainfully. He thought Nie Yan was no more than a passing Thief who was lusting after his equipment. One who was urged on after seeing his red name and the type of gear he was wearing. From the start, he never thought Nie Yan and Tang Yao were connected.

Dian Cang finished casting his spell. Immediately, a blazing ring of fire emerged out of thin air, expanding outwards in every

direction as it headed towards Nie Yan.

After casting Fierce Flame Ring, the Elementalist immediately retreated backwards.

Nie Yan was assaulted by the sensation of scorching flames!

Nie Yan was inwardly surprised. This guy's reaction speed is pretty quick...

“Thief!” The nearby Berserker and Priest finally reacted to the situation and immediately began taking action.

At present, it was much too dangerous for Nie Yan to turn his back on them and try to make an escape. If the Berserker were to start off with Charge, and then the Elementalist and Priest were to follow up with their attacks, he would undoubtedly die!

“Kill him!” Dian Cang forced Nie Yan to halt his steps by casting Fierce Flame Ring. The Berserker seized this opportunity and went to cut off his escape. Meanwhile, Dian Cang started putting more distance between himself and Nie Yan so that he could calmly cast spells from the back.

How could Nie Yan not understand his intentions? He knew that retreating at this moment was the same as asking Dian Cang to barrage him with spells.

With a flick of a finger, a scroll appeared in his hand. Although

he was a little regretful, he still used it without the slightest bit of hesitation.

「System: Your movement speed has been increased by 20% for 30 seconds!」

Nie Yan's base movement speed was already quite high. However, with the twenty percent increase, it had reached an astonishing level. He welcomed the oncoming blaze head on and rushed forward.

「Boom!」An explosion rang out as the Fierce Flame Ring struck Nie Yan.

-35

「System: The opposing party lead by player Dian Cang (Blue Drop) has taken the initiative to attack you. You are free to retaliate in legitimate self-defense. Time: 30 minutes.」

The retaliation period increased to thirty minutes when facing a small party. It would increase even further in team battles or guild wars.

The magic damage from Dian Cang's Fierce Flame Ring was quite high. If Nie Yan hadn't changed his old gear to his current Bronze-grade equipment, this Fierce Flame Ring would've surely taken out at least the greater half of his health!

Sparks scattered in every direction as Nie Yan rushed through the Fierce Flame Ring, rapidly drawing closer to Dian Cang. He stabbed out with his dagger, aiming directly at his opponent's chest.

Dian Cang had originally hoped that his Fierce Flame Ring would force Nie Yan to withdraw. He never thought that Nie Yan would be so unwavering in his offense, pushing ahead instead of retreating. His speed was even faster than it was just moment prior. Moreover, he hadn't expected that his spell would do so little damage to Nie Yan. He honestly thought that it would deal around fifty damage at the very least.

He hastily retreated backwards while casting Small Fireball.

“Assassinate!”

「Splash!」Blood gushed out and splattered everywhere. Nie Yan had met the spell head on as his dagger penetrated Dian Cang's chest.

Finally, within melee range, his dagger flashed with a chilling light.

This wasn't the first time Dian Cang had faced a Thief in combat, but it was definitely the first time he had felt such enormous pressure. Nie Yan's damage was quite high and his movements were extremely quick.

He used a scroll!

Dian Cang hurriedly drew back and pulled out a talisman for his next spell. As he put some distance between himself and his opponent, he prepared to cast Scorching Flame Explosion.

Scorching Flame Explosion required five syllables, two gestures, and a magic catalyst to cast; the spell wouldn't cast if even one of these components were missing. Fortunately, the talismans could be bought in stores and weren't expensive at all.

The Berserker came around from the side, then leapt into the air and cleaved down towards Nie Yan with Flame Slash. He was covering for Dian Cang so that the latter could cast their spell.

The two had fairly good teamwork. The Berserker had managed to block Nie Yan at a crucial time.

Red coloured fire elements began rapidly coalescing. In Dian Cang's arsenal of spells, Scorching Flame Explosion had the highest amount of damage. If the opponent's magic resistance was low, it was even possible for them to be instantly killed on the spot.

The magic resistance of Thieves could only be considered average. Their base magic resistance was equal to sixty percent of their defense.

The casting time for Scorching Flame Explosion was five seconds.

Seeing the Berserker leap at him from the side, Nie Yan waited until the edge of the oncoming blade was in front of his eyes. In that moment, Nie Yan swiftly and elegantly raised his dagger, parrying the blow.

The three-inch dagger and Berserker's greatsword clashed against each other. A sharp metallic sound rang out, jolting both players at the same time. The Berserker's greatsword struggled to advance by even half an inch.

Dian Cang continued retreating backwards while chanting out cryptic sounding syllables one after another. His voice radiated out with a muffled yet explosive power.

This voice was beckoning the elements to his call.

「Bang!」A ray of holy light had struck Nie Yan, dealing thirteen damage. Although this Priest's damage output was limited, he still continued to attack Nie Yan regardless.

Nie Yan quickly went in pursuit of Dian Cang once more after he had parried the Berserker's attack.

The Elementalist's heart shook in awe after witnessing this Thief who was still advancing forward, even after facing an onslaught of fierce attacks. What a valiant Thief!

Nie Yan clearly understood that he had no time to think because he would lose his life if he hesitated in the slightest. In order to preserve his life, he could only put it at stake.

He bravely faced the enemy head on so that he could achieve victory.

Countless years of PvP experience from his past life gave Nie Yan extremely sharp instincts. He wouldn't lose!

Three seconds... four seconds... blazing flames were rapidly coalescing into a huge mass atop Dian Cang's staff. Soon the flames had rotated into a chaotic mass of deadly scorching fire essence.

Nie Yan dashed forward at full speed and arrived in front of Dian Cang.

“Concussive Blow!”

In the end, Dian Cang was just a step slower. Nie Yan bashed his dagger into the Elementalist's skull. The Scorching Flame Explosion rapidly collapsed before completely dissipating into thin air.

Concussive Blow had the effect of interrupting attacks. Therefore Nie Yan attacking Dian Cang with Concussive Blow in the middle of casting caused Dian Cang's spell to be cancelled.

Nie Yan felt the tight heartstrings in his chest loosen by a bit. I

barely made it. If I had let him successfully cast Scorching Flame Explosion, I just can't imagine what sort of consequences there would've been.

The Berserker's Flame Slash had been parried, and in the blink of an eye, Nie Yan had already gotten out of his attack range. Furthermore, he had also managed to interrupt and stun Dian Cang.

Too fast. The Berserker felt a chill in his heart. Nie Yan's speed was much faster than any other Thief he had seen before. However, he didn't have the time to continue staring out blankly. He brandished his sword and activated Charge. The Berserker resembled a tank as he came crashing forward in Nie Yan's direction.

"Vital Strike!" Nie Yan completely ignored the incoming Berserker. He took advantage of Dian Cang's dazed state to activate Vital Strike and pierce his dagger into Dian Cang's heart.

「System: Vital Strike successful! Attack +5%, causing additional damage!」

The sixty or so health Dian Cang had remaining immediately started to plummet, then completely disappeared.「Thud!」 Everything he was wearing, from his upper body to his lower body, dropped. From his headgear to his mage robes, gloves, pants, and boots, not a single piece of equipment remained. Every single piece of equipment had dropped and fallen on the ground.

「System: You have killed a red name player, and receive Fame +1!」

In the game, it was possible to receive a little fame for killing a player who had their name marked in red. However, you wouldn't receive any more fame after killing the same red-named player more than three times. Killing red-named players wasn't the only way to earn fame, though, players would also receive it for completing missions. The higher a player's fame, the easier it would be to receive certain missions. Fame would also allow players to receive more preferential treatment in towns and cities.

By the time Nie Yan had killed Dian Cang, the charging Berserker had finally arrived and came slashing down with his sword. Nie Yan dodged by side stepping, and their shoulders brushed as the charging Berserker missed his target.

Nie Yan was right before his eyes. The Berserker had been absolutely certain his attack would hit Nie Yan. He never expected that Nie Yan would actually dodge all of a sudden, leaving him to continue charging far off into the distance.

“All of the captain's equipment dropped! Quickly, pick it up!” the Berserker anxiously shouted. Dian Cang was an important figure within the Radiant Sacred Flame guild and someone who frequently participated in guild dungeon runs. Every piece of equipment on his body was extremely valuable and rare. Even if you compared it to the entire guild, it would still be considered more valuable. If one were to estimate their value, they would be worth more than ten silvers!

However, the dropped equipment was just too far away from him. When he looked back, he found that Nie Yan was already beginning to pick the equipment up.

The Priest quickly ran over to where Dian Cang dropped his equipment after dying. Just prior, he had run off into the distance, casting spells from the back in order to evade Nie Yan. How could he possibly make it back in time to grab some of the equipment?

Just as Nie Yan had bent over and stuffed two pieces of equipment in his bag, a ray of holy light struck his body.

-17

A damage value floated above Nie Yan's head.

Linear Slash!

The Berserker came leaping forward with his sword, slashing towards Nie Yan.

Nie Yan ignored the oncoming Berserker's slash and continued stuffing one piece of equipment after another into his bag.

Ah... that's everything. Picking up equipment sure does make a person happy. By the time he lifted his head back up, the Berserker had already arrived in front of him.

「Bang!」The Berserker's sword aura struck Nie Yan's body, causing him to lose twenty-two health.

Nie Yan only had twenty-three health remaining, yet he still maintained a cool head. He rapidly fell back and drank a Basic Health Potion.

“Brat! Let's see if I can't hack you to death!” Dian Cang had been killed. If he didn't kill Nie Yan, then he would have a hard time facing Dian Cang. As a result, he frantically pursued Nie Yan with bloodshot eyes.

Chapter 21 – Fire Chaser Set

“That would require you to have at least some skill!” Nie Yan laughed in contempt as he turned around and dashed away.

He managed to pull himself away from the Berserker almost instantaneously. The Thief was already an inherently nimble profession. Yet now, with the dexterity bonus from his Bronze-grade equipment and the movement speed bonus from the scroll, Nie Yan vastly outstripped the Berserker in terms of speed.

Nie Yan had already retreated five yards back.

“Don’t let him run away, or else we won’t be able to explain ourselves to the captain!” the Berserker shouted anxiously. He was too slow. There was absolutely no way he’d be able to catch up. As he took a quick glance at Charge on his skill bar, he lamented the fact that it was still on cooldown.

“I know.” The Priest attacked once more. A beam of holy light struck Nie Yan, dealing sixteen damage.

The Berserker relentlessly pursued from behind.

However, from the start, Nie Yan never intended to escape. He was simply stalling for time so that a few skills could come off cooldown.

Just as the Priest finished casting, Nie Yan pulled back and began

applying bandages to himself.

+20... +20... +20... +20—

Gradually, his health began restoring every second. On the fourth tick, the Priest struck Nie Yan with another beam of holy light, interrupting the healing.

Though by this time, Nie Yan had already been restored to full health.

At present, with the average level of the player base, Intermediate Combat Medic was an existence that defied the Heavens.

“He has a Medic skill!” the Berserker exclaimed in surprise; a hint of fear could be heard in his tone. What kind of Medic skill is this!? The Medic skills he had seen in the past could only be used when combat ended. Nonetheless, they would still only restore five health every second. Yet... Nie Yan’s skill restored twenty! He had never even encountered a Medic skill like Nie Yan’s that could be used in the middle of combat, let alone one that had such outrageous healing effects too.

It was a painstaking effort trying to get Nie Yan down to low health. His death was right before their eyes. Then all of a sudden, the situation completely reversed!

By now all of Nie Yan’s skills had come off cooldown. The corner

of his lips faintly curved into a smile. Now it's your turn! He turned around and dashed in the direction of the Berserker.

The Berserker's complexion turned deathly white as he watched Nie Yan pounce towards him. Hurriedly, he raised his sword in an attempt to resist.

Nie Yan at full health could kill their captain even while being attacked on three sides. Now that Dian Cang was dead, how could just the two of them possibly be a match for Nie Yan!?

The dagger in Nie Yan's hand sliced in a wide arc, then suddenly changed direction mid slash. Concussive Blow!「Thwack!」The Berserker's greatsword crashed into Nie Yan's chest. At the same time, the pommel of Nie Yan's dagger hit the Berserker [directly on the forehead!](#)

The Berserker sunk into a dazed state.

Assassinate! Nie Yan plunged the dagger into the Berserker's chest. He then followed up with Vital Strike, sending the dagger even deeper into his target. Instantly, the Berserker lost the greater portion of his health.

Seeing the Berserker about to come back to his sense, Nie Yan circled behind him and used Smothering Strike, putting him in a dazed state once more.

Due to performing a series of attacks and having been in combat

so long, Nie Yan was running somewhat low on stamina. Taking a deep breath, he plunged his dagger into the Berserker's back.

Through the sequence of explosive attacks, the Berserker's health had gone from over a hundred and eighty to a mere sixty within just a few short seconds.

If this continues, I'm dead for sure!

The Berserker was distraught with fear as he emerged from his dazed state. He frantically fled in the other direction in an attempt to preserve his life.

If the Berserker had turned around and attacked Nie Yan, he might've still been able to cause some damage. However, he chose not to because he was self-centered and cowardly. Instead, he panicked as soon as he saw his health was low, desperately running for his life just because he was afraid of losing a piece of equipment upon death.

"You think you can escape?" Nie Yan pursued, effortlessly arriving behind the Berserker's back. He raised his dagger, then successively slashed his opponent several times in the back.

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“Argh... Dammit—!” The Berserker cursed as his health fell to zero and his vision faded to black. His body collapsed and landed flat on the ground. Just a moment later, a piece of equipment dropped from his corpse.

“Heh. It’s finally your turn.” Nie Yan dashed towards the Priest after picking up the Berserker’s dropped equipment. He had taken quite a sore beating from this Priest. From the time he was fighting Dian Cang up until the Berserker just now, this Priest was constantly firing off attacks at him like a buzzing fly.

Seeing the Berserker collapsed on the ground, the Priest stared out foolishly. How did he suddenly become the only one remaining in the blink of an eye? He was just a low-level Priest who hadn’t even learned any healing skills. How could he possibly be a match for this Thief?

The Priest turned his back and broke into a mad sprint. At that moment, he had completely thrown away any thoughts of trying to fight Nie Yan. No matter what course of action he took, he would still end up dead. Therefore his first instinctual reaction was to flee for his life.

Nie Yan was already in pursuit. Mage professions like this Priest were inherently rather slow, so where could a Priest like him possibly escape to?

As Nie Yan slashed in quick succession, his dagger easily tore through the Priest’s cloth armour.

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Several damage values floated above the Priest's head. Before he had even made a few steps, his body fell forward and collapsed on the ground.

Nie Yan walked up to the Priest's corpse and picked up the piece of equipment that dropped.

The equipment the Priest and Berserker dropped were rather ordinary—two pieces of Level 0 equipment that were both White-grade. The best pieces of gear were still the ones that were dropped by the Elementalist: headgear, gloves, mage robes, staff, pants, and boots. Six pieces of equipment in total, and not one less.

Fire Chaser Crown: Fire Damage +5

Fire Chaser Gloves: Balance +3

Fire Chaser Robes: Fire Damage +10

Fire Chaser Pants: Willpower +2

Fire Chaser Boots: Movement Speed +2

It's the Fire Chaser set! No wonder that Elementalist's damage was so high! The equipment for this set came from the Level 3 instance, Black Flame Forest. Before Level 5 instances were released, this set was regarded as the best possible equipment for Mages that focused on fire magic. Of course, because it was good,

the set pieces had a rather low drop rate. It would take at least four or five runs through the Black Flame Forest to collect all the pieces required to complete the entire set.

Besides the Fire Chaser set, there was also a Silver-grade Level 0 Tempered Blue Staff. It had the additional properties of Magic +3 and Elemental Damage +5.

Nie Yan reckoned that Dian Cang's intestines were now green with regret. Even if Dian Cang continued killing Tang Yao and his party members until they dropped back to Level 0, it still wouldn't be worth losing every single piece of equipment on his body.

Not bad... he even had a Silver-grade staff, Nie Yan thought to himself. If he were to put this staff up for auction, it would at the very least sell for three silvers.

This Bronze-grade Fire Chaser set can be equipped by both Elementalists and Arcane Mages because both of these professions have fire magic. Elementalists are able to control the fire elements, whereas Arcane Mages are able to control arcane fire. Nie Yan could gift Tang Yao this Fire Chaser set as a present. As for the Silver-grade staff, Tang Yao wasn't able to use it. As such, Nie Yan thought about selling it and using the money for other expenses. If not, he could always exchange it for one or two pieces of equipment instead.

「Where are you right now? Tell me your coordinates.」

「231.395.285, there's a cave in that area where Level 5 monsters

spawn inside. I'm in that cave right now, hiding in a corner and afraid to come out.」

「I killed three members from the Radiant Sacred Flame guild. One of them was called Dian Cang or something.」

「You killed Dian Cang? You're not lying to me, are you? That bastard was too damned overpowered. He took out three of my party members all by himself. With his magic damage, a single Fireball was able to take out half our health.」To Tang Yao, Nie Yan killing Dian Cang was an amazing and unimaginable outcome.

「The guy's name was marked in bright red. He dropped every single piece of equipment from his body when he died. Here, this is his equipment. It's the Fire Chaser set. I'll give it to you as a gift.」

Brother, I was lucky to have you watch out for me in my past life. I've burdened you with much too many things. Before I even got to repay you back, I ended up reincarnating. Brother! In this life, I'll be the one to watch out for you instead! Nie Yan inwardly thought as he shared the Fire Chaser set with Tang Yao.

Tang Yao's mouth was agape. His face was filled with surprise as he stared at the equipment Nie Yan shared with him.

「This isn't real, right?」Tang Yao slapped himself in the face to confirm he was seeing things clearly. 「This set... are you sure you want to gift this to me?」

Tang Yao naturally knew what this Fire Chaser set signified. It was only possible to get this set after running the Black Flame Forest four or five times. Not to mention that teams would often get wiped while running it as well. If he were to wear this set and enter an instance with another party, then it could be said that from the value of this set alone, it was certain that those members would rush to recruit him into their team.

「Do you think I'm making fun of you or something!？」Nie Yan scolded Tang Yao and laughed.

「Even if I die today, it'll still be worth it. Although I'm only eighteen years old this year and still haven't experienced many serious matters in life, what I'm most proud of is that I managed to find [a brother like you!](#)」Tang Yao emotionally exclaimed. He naturally understood Nie Yan's financial situation. This Fire Chaser set... if Nie Yan were to put it up at a transaction platform for real money, the price he'd fetch would be quite considerable. Yet Nie Yan was actually preparing to send him this set as a gift. This proved that Nie Yan truly regarded him as a brother.

Nie Yan thought back to the past. What he had wanted to say the most to Tang Yao in his past life were those words as well.

「When it comes to brothers like us, there's no need to be polite! Wait up, I'm going to kill a few more of them,」Nie Yan informed. He still had twenty-five minutes remaining where he was allowed to retaliate in self-defense.

「I never thought that a guy like you would be so gifted at playing this game. When I listened to your advice earlier in the day,

everything suddenly became clear to me, and my skill significantly improved. Otherwise, I would've never been able to hold on up until now,」Tang Yao informed. He admired Nie Yan from the bottom of his heart. After seeing his performance today, he couldn't help but at Nie Yan in a whole new light.

His equipment would vastly improve with this Fire Chaser set, and he would enter the ranks of experts.

In the past, Tang Yao had regarded Nie Yan as a poor and pitiful brother. One whom he would have watch out for in everything. But now, Nie Yan's actions had caused him to look up to and admire Nie Yan. For the first time, he felt this brother of his was quite truly, a capable person.

Chapter 22 – Deer Chief

「Arcane Mages only have so many skills. So all you need to do is put on that Fire Chaser set, practice your skills for a bit, and you'll find yourself improving in no time.」

「There are over twenty people. How do you plan on dealing with all of them?」Tang Yao asked. No matter how strong Nie Yan was, he was still just a single person.

「This is the difference between Thieves and other professions. Thieves don't necessarily have to attack head on!」

The expertise of a Thief lay in their ability to set ambushes.

Tang Yao somewhat understood when he heard these words. Nie Yan was preparing to mount a sneak attack, catch them off guard and take them out one by one. However, this wasn't going to be easy to pull off. If he wasn't careful and ended up getting caught, then he would most likely end up dead. Tang Yao couldn't help but think that perhaps Nie Yan was being a bit too confident.

Small hilltops stretched out as far as the eye could see. They were covered in dense thickets of trees and strangely shaped boulders that towered over the landscape. Small streams flowed at the base of each hillside, where dense amounts of stone and rubble could be seen littering the nearby area. The terrain of this place was quite complicated. It was no wonder that Tang Yao could hide in this area for so long without anyone discovering him.

Off in the distance, a few indistinct figures could be seen at the top of one of these hillsides. Nie Yan sprinted off in that direction.

Tang Yao was hiding within a cave on that exact hilltop.

This group of scoundrels was rather unrelenting. They seemed to be fine wasting their time trying to completely exterminate Tang Yao's party, simply because a minor conflict had arisen between the two of them. They were truly too vicious, and the only reason they dared to act in such a way was because they noticed that Tang Yao's group didn't have a guild backing them up. Therefore, even if Tang Yao and his friends were killed off, they would have no one to bring up their grievances to. Today the Radiant Sacred Flame members were killing Tang Yao's group in order to make them drop a level. They did this with the intent of impeding their progress. This was to prevent Tang Yao and his party from becoming more troublesome when they leveled up in the future.

Nie Yan traveled through the dense thickets. He was only around a hundred meters away from the cave that Tang Yao was hiding in.

「I'm not too far away from you. For now, it's best you don't come out, so just keep hiding.」

「Be careful, they aren't weak.」Tang Yao knew what Nie Yan wanted to do, and couldn't help but worry a little.

「No worries. With their levels, I'll be able to easily toy with them to death.」Nie Yan's bag was full of potions, his gear was Bronze-grade, and he had learned many new skills. Furthermore, he

possessed the immensely overpowered Intermediate Combat Medic skill. Killing one or two of them wouldn't be a problem for him at all.

Tang Yao felt that Nie Yan had changed a great deal. In fact, he had changed so much that Tang Yao didn't even recognize him anymore. The cowardly Nie Yan of the past wouldn't dare to say such words.

Nie Yan had become a lot more confident compared to his past self. Not only that, but he also gave off the feeling that you could firmly place your trust in him.

While Nie Yan and Tang Yao were talking, a slight rustling noise could be heard off in the distance.

「They're here.」Nie Yan's eyebrows raised as he took cover behind a tree.

A party of five was moving through the nearby thickets.

Nie Yan observed the composition of their party: an Elementalist, a Holy Mage, a Berserker, a Fighter, and a Paladin. The frontliners took the lead while the two casters followed from behind. This was a rather standard formation. Their equipment didn't look like anything special either. Within the current player base, those who could wear Bronze-grade or Silver-grade equipment were few in number.

The dense thickets were full of branches that grew without restraint and got in the way. These branches made it very difficult for the group of five to move forward, as they had no choice but to duck their heads and travel through small gaps between the trees. The Berserker even had to use his sword to chop down the occasional thick branch that would obstruct their path.

“Captain Dian Cang was killed,” the Fighter said as he looked at the team chat.

“How’s that possible? With the Captain’s strength, there are very few people capable of beating him,” the Paladin replied in a surprised tone. Dian Cang’s strength was publicly recognized amongst all of them. With the Fire Chaser set, his damage was at least within the top ten in the entire guild. Not to mention his skill in combat wasn’t bad either.

“The Captain’s name was still marked red. Which means that all that equipment on his body...?” the Elementalist raised his head to look at everyone and discovered the gloomy expressions on each of their faces. None of them dared to ask what happened next.

“Everything dropped,” the Fighter gloomily exclaimed. They truly were unlucky today.

“Who did it?”

“They must have had a lot of people, right?” the Elementalist questioned. In his mind, there should have been no other way. Whoever killed Dian Cang must’ve brought many people in order

to do so. “Which team was it, or was it perhaps the work of a guild? We’ll exterminate them!”

“The enemy was only a single Thief,” the Fighter replied. When he had heard the news himself, he too felt that it was inconceivable.

“Wait, weren’t there two other people with the Captain?”

“Indeed. However, that one Thief managed to kill all three of them.”

What? How is that possible!?

“What level was the Thief?”

“Level 3.”

A single Level 3 Thief managed to kill Dian Cang and his party. This was simply too crazy! Everyone felt that such a thing was simply outrageous.

“Are you sure you aren’t mistaken?”

“This piece of information came straight from the mouth of the Captain himself.”

The information couldn't be false. After all, a single Level 3 had wiped out his entire party. For Dian Cang, this definitely wasn't something he was proud of. If the information wasn't true, then he wouldn't be proclaiming it everywhere.

“What was that Thief's name?” the Elementalist asked. Currently, the level difference among the player base wasn't high. Being able to fight one versus two was already a huge accomplishment, but being able to win one versus three... this person must have had some kind of god level combat ability.

“He's called Nie Yan (Nirvana Flame), and the guild's put out a hit order on him. The reward for killing him once is five silvers. In the future, if anyone encounters this player, they are to remain vigilant. Captain Dian Cang said that person has a lot of skills. Unless your party is over three members, it's best not to seek him out with the intent of provoking him,” the Fighter announced. Although the reward for killing Nie Yan was luxurious, they were still required to put their lives on the line to do it. Dian Cang was unable to defeat him, let alone them.

“Five silvers is a lot of money!” the Elementalist and the others exclaimed in amazement. Five silvers was more than enough for them to buy several pieces of Bronze-grade equipment.

While these people were deep in discussion, Nie Yan had stealthily made his way over to them.

A kill order from the Radiant Sacred Flame Guild? Interesting... I'd like to see how you intend to do that. Nie Yan smiled disdainfully as he approached from behind and confirmed the

positions of the five people.

The closest one to him was the Holy Mage at about three meters away. The next was the Elementalist at about five meters. The furthest away were the Berserker, Fighter, and Paladin, who were clearing the way ahead.

Occasionally, one or two Level 3 Deer would appear in this area. However, they would be swiftly killed by these five people. Three powerful members who could fight in close combat, along with two Mages who had high magic damage made killing monsters especially quick.

Nie Yan was waiting for the right opportunity as he leisurely followed them from behind.

The Holy Mage seemed to have sensed something and turned his head back to look around.

Nie Yan hurriedly hid behind a nearby tree. He hadn't activated Stealth yet, instead, he was relying entirely on his own awareness. As he ducked away from this Holy Mage's line of sight, the shade from the tree concealed his body. The Thief's innate concealing abilities would automatically reveal its effects.

Everything was serene. The Holy Mage didn't discover anything strange. Could it have just been my imagination?

"There are monsters ahead. Hurry up and catch up with us," the

Elementalist turned his head and said to the Holy Mage who was lagging behind.

“Oh, alright,” the Holy Mage replied, and quickened his pace to catch up.

Hearing the conversation between those two people, Nie Yan’s heartbeat jumped. His opportunity had arrived. He entered Stealth and slightly accelerated his pace.

“There’s a Leader-class Deer. Everyone be careful!” the Fighter yelled out as he raised his round wooden shield and slowly proceeded forward.

“We’re not searching for that Arcane Mage anymore?”

“We have no idea where that brat ran off to. In any case, the situation has turned out like this. Let’s kill this Deer Chief first, then we’ll discuss it afterward.

As it was five of them versus a single Deer Chief, they expected an easy fight.

A huge Deer emerged from the thickets ahead. It had a build similar to that of a [Bison](#), and its entire body was covered in white spots. Immense antlers that resembled overgrown coral sprouted from its head. The deer lowered its head, its antlers reaching down past its knees, and prepared to charge.

The moment the Deer Chief moved, the muscles in its forelimbs incessantly trembled, brimming with an explosive power.

The moment it saw the Fighter approaching, it lowered its antlers and issued a warning cry, then slowly began moving forward.

Deer Chief: Level 3

Leader Class Monster

Health: 200/200

“Are you guys ready?” the Fighter nervously shouted back to his allies. His Wooden Round Shield and the Deer’s antlers were only a few meters apart, yet he was still able to feel the powerful and imposing pressure that emanated from this Deer Chief’s robust body.

“Ready.”

“We have to kill this Deer Chief before Fei Zha, Xia Ku, and the others arrive,” the Fighter instructed. If the five of them killed this Deer Chief now, then the loot would be distributed evenly amongst the five of them. However, if the others were to arrive, then they wouldn’t receive much after distributing it evenly.

The Berserker and Paladin were flanking from both sides, while the Holy Mage and Elementalist took their positions away from the front.

Chapter 23 – Coming And Going

Unobstructed

The Fighter shouted with a booming voice then rushed forward and cleaved down with the sword in his right hand.「Slash!」The sword left a large wound after it struck the Deer Chief's body.

The Deer Chief took one step forward and swept its sharp antlers at the Fighter.

The Fighter pulled back a bit and raised his shield to defend against the incoming blow.「Bang!」A heavy sound reverberated as a pair of antlers collided with a round wooden shield.

The Berserker and Paladin took this opportunity to flank the Deer Chief on both sides in a pincer attack.

“Guys, pay attention to your aggro,” the Fighter urged with a worried tone. Due to their ability to wield a shield, Fighters had a much higher defense when compared to other professions. Because of this, the Deer Chief was only able to deal ten or so damage to the Fighter when it attacked. However, if the Deer Chief were to switch aggro onto the Berserker or Paladin... they would at most be able to survive five attacks.

Monsters would initially focus their aggro on whoever attacked them first. However, in the event that there was someone who dealt too much damage to a monster, or a player's level or power was exceedingly low, the monster's aggro would switch onto them.

“We know. You can relax,” replied the Berserker and Paladin.

The Holy Mage and Elementalist at the back began casting spells and dealing damage.

Their coordination would be considered about average. It seemed that killing the Deer Chief within the next few moments wouldn't be a problem for them. Only, they weren't aware of the danger that was quietly approaching from behind.

Nie Yan stealthily made his way behind the Holy Mage and Elementalist. Only a few steps more and he would close the distance between them. The two Mages were standing quite close to each other, and their attention was focused entirely on the Deer Chief.

It appeared that the Deer Chief would be dead within the next thirty seconds. The party members were filled with an endless amount of excitement when they thought about all the loot they would receive.

Before Nie Yan's eyes, the heads of the Holy Mage and Elementalist were completely exposed.

Nie Yan's pacing slowed as he drew closer, as he needed to be more cautious when he neared his target. Otherwise, there was a possibility that the prey within his grasp would slip away.

Patience was another major quality that defined a Thief's competence. After all, the outcome of their battles often depended on whether their first strike was a success or not. Of course, there was also an endless amount of sneaking and preparation which led up to that first strike. If a Thief lacked patience, it would be very easy for others to find flaws and catch them.

The battle between this group of players and the Deer Chief was about to reach its climax. The Deer Chief had been unceasingly ramming its antlers against the Fighter, causing the latter's health to rapidly fall. When his health fell to around twenty, the Fighter took out a Basic Health Potion and drank it.

"Keep it up, everyone! The Deer Chief only has half its health remaining!" the Fighter shouted as he raised his shield and slashed forward with his sword again.

The Berserker and Paladin followed suit, increasing their attack speed. While in combat with the Deer Chief, their health had fallen to about half. The only ones who hadn't received any damage were the two Mages in the back.

"Lei Zi, fall back a bit. Why are you so far forward?" the Fighter admonished to the Berserker.

"I know, I know." The Berserker hurriedly pulled back.

Evidently, out of the five people in this group, it appeared that this Fighter had the most combat experience.

“When we’re running a dungeon in the future, you guys absolutely cannot go too far forward. Otherwise, you’re looking to get yourself killed. Realize your mistakes today, and tomorrow we’ll run a small five-man dungeon together. Once you guys get more familiarized with team-based combat, then we can start running larger dungeons with a full team,” the Fighter said. He then took a few steps back, luring the Deer Chief in between two large trees.

“What activities has the guild been doing lately?” The Berserker’s eyes lit up as he asked.

“There have always been guild activities. The Guild Leader and some of the others have been running the Treant Forest and Dark Wetlands for awhile now. You think you’re good enough to accompany them?” the Fighter asked rhetorically.

The people running the Treant Forest and Dark Wetlands were all elites in the Radiant Sacred Flame guild. In terms of a player’s defense, attack, health, etc... their guild had harsh requirements. So unless a player’s equipment reached a certain level, or they had good skills, there was basically no chance that they would be allowed to run a dungeon with the elites. In other words, this group of five shouldn’t even dream of going.

“There’s no Level 2 dungeons? You know, like the Moose Rat Cavern or Skeleton Cave?” the Berserker asked. These dungeons were also twenty-person instances. They were easier and the equipment that could be looted wasn’t bad either. Which was why running one of these dungeons would help them upgrade their equipment in preparation for the higher ranked ones.

“The Guild Leader will be organizing something in a few days, so let’s focus on raising our levels for now. Be careful and don’t let your attention wane. But for now, let’s get rid of this Deer Chief. Who knows? It might drop some decent equipment.” The Fighter took two more steps back. His retreat was firm and stable.

The Holy Mage and Elementalist copied him and retreated a few steps back as well.

Nie Yan noticed the opposing Fighter was rather decent. His ability to pull aggro was quite good. As soon as he noticed the Deer Chief was about to switch its aggro, he would strike it with his shield and attract its attention again.

With its aggro constantly being attracted and pulled, the Deer Chief was unable to display its full fighting strength.

Were it not for this Fighter, this team wouldn’t have stood a chance against this Level 3 Deer Chief.

Nie Yan’s movements were extremely cautious in order to prevent being detected by the Holy Mage and Elementalist. However, they unexpectedly started retreating back towards him.

For fucks sake... Nie Yan thought. The Holy Mage had already retreated back to where he was hiding.

Nie Yan raised his dagger and struck down, aiming at the back of

the Holy Mage's head.

“Smothering Strike!”

His dagger hit the Holy Mage and put him under a dazed state.

“Someone's trying to steal our kill!” the Elementalist beside them noticed the commotion and turned his head, immediately discovering Nie Yan. Yet before even half of these words could come out of his mouth, Nie Yan dashed over and used the handle of his dagger to strike the Elementalist in the forehead.

“Concussive Blow!”

After successfully stunning his target, Nie Yan followed up with Assassinate, Lacerate, and finished it off with a Vital Strike aimed at his opponent's throat.

Nie Yan's actions were quite fast. In just a short amount of time, he managed to inflict a massive amount of damage.

-20

-22

-29

-36

Four damage values floated above the Elementalist's head. By the

time the Elementalist came out of his dazed state, he was left with only eighteen health remaining.

The Mage had gone into a state of panic—Nie Yan's damage was just too terrifying.

-5

-5

Two more damage values floated above the Elementalist's head in succession.

The Elementalist hurriedly took out a Basic Health Potion. Just as the bottle touched his lips... Nie Yan's dagger flashed into view and lightly slashed across his chest. -8 A damage value floated atop his head.

The Elementalist staggered back and reached out as if to grasp something, but his hand found only empty air. Soon after, he collapsed on the ground as his health bar fell to zero.

"That's one down," Nie Yan whispered to himself as he picked up the piece of equipment that the Elementalist dropped.

By this time the Holy Mage had come out of his daze. But, unluckily for him, Nie Yan had already finished off the Elementalist. The Holy Mage turned tail and attempted to escape, but how could Nie Yan possibly give him such an opportunity?

Nie Yan brandished his dagger and gave chase to the fleeing Mage. After catching up, he unleashed a barrage of attacks on the Holy Mage's back.

-12

-13

-15

Without exception, every single one of his skills was on cooldown. Therefore Nie Yan could only use a normal attack. However, due to a Thief's attack speed being innately fast, the damage dealt was still quite considerable.

The Holy Mage wasn't about to go down without a fight, though. He turned around and hit Nie Yan with Holy Strike, then followed up with Holy Smite—dealing a total of fifty-three damage.

During all this, the Fighter, Berserker, and Paladin had continued fighting with the Deer Chief. They became aware of the situation after noticing that, all of a sudden, the constant damage from their Mages in the rear had suddenly disappeared.

“Someone mounted a sneak attack! It's that Thief, Nie Yan (Nirvana Flame)!” the Fighter anxiously shouted. Why did this scoundrel have to suddenly appear during such a crucial moment in their fight against the Leader class monster?

In addition, Nie Yan still had over twenty minutes of Retaliation Time left!

“What are we gonna do!?” Little by little, the Berserker slowly retreated. Their current circumstances were quite unfavourable. They were suffering from a pincer attack, with the Deer Chief attacking from the front and Nie Yan attacking from the rear. The three frontline had been constantly dealing with the Deer Chief, which was why each of them had a little under half their health remaining. If they were even a little careless, it was very likely that all five of them would die here today. In the blink of an eye, Nie Yan had taken out their Elementalist. Their other Mage was still alive, but he barely had any health left. The way things were looking, the situation was about to become even more worrisome!

“First, kill the Deer Chief; we’ll deal with the rest later!” the Fighter instructed. The Deer Chief’s aggro was completely focused on them. If they ignored the Deer Chief and went after Nie Yan instead, it would definitely cause them trouble later on.

The Deer Chief doesn’t have much health left!

“Cleave!”

The Fighter cleaved down with his sword. The Berserker and Paladin also quickened their pace as they unceasingly hacked at the Deer Chief.

“Flame Slash!”

“Radiant Slash!”

The Berserker and Paladin each used their most powerful skills, with the intent of causing high amounts of damage. One after another, damage values drifted up from the Deer Chief’s head.

It was a race against time for both sides.

The battle between Nie Yan and the Holy Mage was also nearing its climax. The two continued to battle as they ran, with one fleeing from the other. Nie Yan constantly maneuvered his way around the Holy Mage and repeatedly slashed at his exposed back. Wherever the dagger struck, blood would spurt out.

The Holy Mage continuously unloaded magic spells as he attempted to break away from Nie Yan.

Gradually, both their health bars fell. However, it was clear that the Holy Mage’s health was falling faster. He hurriedly took out both a Basic Health Potion and a Basic Recovery Potion, then drank them.

+3

+3

Before even a few seconds had passed, Nie Yan struck out and interrupted the healing from the Basic Recovery Potion.

“Run over here!” The Fighter was burning with anxiety as he yelled out. He was fighting the Deer Chief while also keeping a close eye on the battle between Nie Yan and the Holy Mage. It was clear to him that his teammate wasn’t much of a match for this Thief.

The Holy Mage was down to only thirty-six health.

“Damn that bastard. Isn’t he targeting us on purpose?” the Fighter cursed as he continuously slashed at the Deer Chief. After taking out Dian Cang and his group, Nie Yan suddenly appeared here. This definitely wasn’t a coincidence. Don’t tell me... this Thief is friends with that Arcane Mage and his group?

“Nie Yan, I’ll remember you! Our Radiant Sacred Flame guild definitely won’t let you off easily!” the Berserker furiously shouted.

“I’m extremely honoured. I’ll gladly await you maggots at any time,” Nie Yan replied with an indifferent expression. At this point in time, Radiant Sacred Flame was but a small guild. Even if you were to add up all their members, they still wouldn’t surpass a thousand. They certainly didn’t have the time or energy to search everywhere for Nie Yan and Tang Yao. Granted, even if they were able to find Tang Yao and Nie Yan, they still couldn’t possibly dispatch the entire guild after them. Besides, if they were to send everyone over and he decided that he couldn’t afford to take them

on, then couldn't he just hide instead?

In the past, Nie Yan had single-handedly caused the five guilds under the Cao Xu Financial Group to scramble after him. Even their several hundred thousand people were incapable of dealing with him, so why would Nie Yan fear a small fry like Radiant Sacred Flame guild?

Not to mention that the reincarnated Nie Yan was definitely much more difficult to deal with than the Nie Yan from the past.

So what was there for him to be afraid of?

“Even if your backup arrives, they'll simply be sending side dishes!”¹ Nie Yan said with contempt. He stabbed his dagger into the Holy Mage's chest, finishing him off. Glancing at his own health bar, he saw that he still had a little over fifty remaining. This number was within his expectations.

Nie Yan dashed over to where the Warriors were. The Deer Chief's health had been whittled down to where it had only around ten percent remaining. Nie Yan was preparing to snatch whatever equipment dropped from the Deer Chief.

“Kill!” the Fighter furiously yelled while using Shield Strike to push the Deer Chief back.

Suddenly, the Deer Chief started to waver.

“Linear Slash!” the Berserker tightly gripped his greatsword and slashed at the Deer Chief.

-15

A damage value floated above the Deer Chief’s head. It was a critical strike!

The Deer Chief let out a miserable whine and then collapsed.

The Fighter quickly bent down, picked up the item that the Deer Chief dropped, and threw it into his bag.

“I was just a step too late.” Nie Yan halted his movements upon seeing the Fighter pick up the loot, and then began retreating back.

The Fighter only had a quarter of his health remaining, the Berserker had about forty percent, and the Paladin had thirty-five percent. Although they had low health, facing these three close combat professions together certainly wasn’t as simple as it seemed. Not to mention his dagger wouldn’t do much damage against professions with thick armour—such as the Fighter. I can’t deal with the three of them. I’ll be better off not taking this risk, Nie Yan thought to himself.

The Fighter and the two others weren’t willing to take such risks to block off Nie Yan either, as they didn’t have much health remaining. Thus they just stood and waited as their health slowly recovered. Having only gained a single piece of Bronze grade

equipment after losing two people in the fight against the Deer Chief, they certainly weren't looking at a profitable outcome.

“Two more were killed,” the Fighter whispered under his breath as he stared daggers at Nie Yan. If they were to calculate their losses now, a total of five members from the Radiant Sacred Flame guild had been killed by Nie Yan's hands today.

Nie Yan wasn't very far from his enemies. Both sides stood still, simply staring at each other. Neither party dared to attack rashly. Although they all had low health, the three of them together could definitely take on Nie Yan. However, if they were separated, then who could say what the outcome might be.

A single Thief had frightened these three Warriors to the point where they didn't dare to take action. This was simply a huge loss of face. Their expressions showed a hint of anger and humiliation.

Nie Yan extended his right hand forward, raised a certain finger, and made an amusing yet disdainful gesture.

“The three of you aren't going to come? If you're not coming, I might as well leave then.” Nie Yan glanced at the three and laughed mockingly. His eyes seemed to be focused on something deeper within the thickets. Movement and activity could be seen to the south, east, and west of his current position. He reckoned that the other Radiant Sacred Flame members were moving closer in an attempt to encircle him.

Nie Yan didn't dare to be careless, and so hastily started

retreating back. He moved like a hare as he dashed through the gaps between trees.

“Reinforcements have arrived! Block him and don’t let him escape!” The Fighter ordered as he gave chase to Nie Yan.

The Berserker and Paladin followed closely from behind.

「Why did it take you guys so long to get here?」 the Fighter said gloomily in voice chat.

「We found out where that Arcane Mage was hiding and almost managed to catch him. If you guys hadn’t gotten in trouble, that bastard would already be dead. What happened over on your side?」

「Dao Zi and Huang Ni were killed,」the Fighter replied.

「What happened? Weren’t they together with you guys?」

「It was the work of that thief called Nie Yan (Nirvana Flame) again. He mounted a sneak attack against us and killed Dao Zi and Huang Ni,」the Fighter explained. He hid the fact that he and his party members had been fighting a Deer Chief at the time.

「Fuck, it’s that damn Thief again!」

They had never met such a powerful Thief before. Moreover, this

scoundrel had been specifically targeting them this whole time.

「I reckon he's friends with that group of people we killed earlier. He escaped north! Let's chase him!」

Several figures made their way through the gaps in the thicket.

Nie Yan was quite fast. In the blink of an eye, he had already put a large distance between himself and his pursuers. Up ahead, several silhouettes emerged from the trees and flanked him on both sides. He couldn't go any further forward, and the Fighter and the others were pursuing him from behind. No matter where he ran, he would definitely end up surrounded.

Seeing no escape route, Nie Yan hid behind a tree and entered Stealth.

The Fighter, Berserker, and Paladin, who were pursuing from behind, met up with the several figures who appeared up ahead.

“What happened? Where is he?” asked the Fighter. He scanned the surroundings and found naught but trees and empty space. Where had Nie Yan disappeared to?

“Did he run off?”

“I think he went into Stealth. Let's stay here and search.”

The players spread out and began searching every nook and cranny in the surrounding area.

Nie Yan maintained his breathing and made his way out while still under the effects of Stealth.

However, people from the Radiant Sacred Flame guild were everywhere, which meant that the crisis was still unabated.

「Where are you? What's the situation?」Tang Yao asked through the voice call.

「I killed another two,」replied Nie Yan as he glanced at his knapsack. Although there were two new pieces of equipment inside, they weren't anything special. Even if he put it up for auction, it would only sell for a few coppers at most.

「Awesome! Brat, I'm impressed!」Tang Yao exclaimed in admiration. The Radiant Sacred Flame members usually operated in groups of three or four. Tang Yao couldn't help but wonder how Nie Yan managed to accomplish such a feat.

「Where are you right now?」asked Nie Yan.

「I encountered a group of Radiant Sacred Flame members just a moment ago. I almost ended up being caught by them, so I fled deeper into the cave. In the end, they left the cave and went back outside. But now I can't get out; there're Level 5 monsters everywhere and they've got me trapped,」replied Tang Yao. He

guessed the reason why those Radiant Sacred Flame members left was to deal with Nie Yan. This meant Nie Yan had indirectly saved his life. However, the problem was... he was currently in an even more dangerous predicament. The deeper parts of the cave were filled with Level 5 Rock Spiders. If he was even a bit careless, he would most likely lose his life.

「Just stay put. I'll give you a Return Scroll when I get there.」

「Having a Return Scroll would make things a lot easier, but can you even get here? The passage is completely blocked by Rock Spiders now.」

「We'll deal with that later. There's a bit of a problem over on my side, so I'm gonna hang up first.」

Notes:

[1](#)] So the side dishes part is a pun because the Chinese slang for “noob” is the same character as vegetable/side dish. Nie Yan is basically saying that, even if they send more people, they're all noobs and are going to be food (equipment dropped) for him.

Chapter 24 – Rock Spider Cave

Nie Yan hung up the call. Gradually his body became more and more transparent until he completely blended in with the dense green thickets that surrounded him. He carefully observed the players who were constantly passing by.

Several of these players ran straight past Nie Yan, yet not a single one noticed his presence.

“I couldn’t find him. Where the hell could he have gone?”

“Forget about it. He’s probably already escaped by now,” the Berserker named Lei Zi suggested. A slight fear still lingered in his mind, urging him to leave. After all, ever since Nie Yan had appeared they were always the ones being attacked, never the ones attacking. By now the number of dead on their side totalled five people, yet they weren’t even able to touch a single hair on their opponent’s body. He was an extremely dangerous individual, and it definitely wasn’t worth the risk to continue chasing him down like this. What if they were unable to catch him and were killed instead?

“What about that Arcane Mage, Yao Zi?”

“We chased him into the Rock Spider Cavern. When that Thief Nie Yan appeared we were called over to help catch him, so we couldn’t chase that Arcane Mage any longer. But don’t worry, I aggroed a bunch of Rock Spiders and lured them near the passage, so I reckon he won’t be getting out anytime soon.”

“Hang on, I think we should continue searching for that Thief. His Stealth should be coming to an end soon, and he’s definitely still in this area!” the Fighter said, unwilling to give up the search. How could he just allow Nie Yan to escape?

Nie Yan locked his gaze on the Berserker who only had forty-five percent health remaining. As the Berserker had just been in combat, he didn’t have the time to sit down and recover his health. In addition, the system still considered him to be in a state of combat, which meant that his natural health recovery would be slowed considerably. Though his nearby guildmates gave him a sense of relief, he still kept a tight grip on the Basic Health Potion he was hiding in his left hand .

Yet there was one other reason why nobody was restoring their health: the Fighter wouldn’t allow it. He was hoping that their low health would lure Nie Yan out into the open.

Even though they couldn’t see Nie Yan, his mere existence forced them to remain cautious.

The Berserker also had a Silencing Paladin at full health by his side. The two of them began walking in Nie Yan’s direction.

Steadily, they drew closer and closer to where Nie Yan was hiding, yet they still didn’t discover him. It was starting to look like the two would walk right into him.

If an enemy were to make contact with a Thief under the effects

of Stealth, the skill would immediately come to an end.

Nie Yan focused his eyes on the Berserker's throat, waited for the right moment, and then pounced. Vital Strike! The dagger slashed across the Berserker's neck, sending blood gushing out.

-51

"He's here!" the Berserker cried out in alarm. He quickly retreated back and drank the Basic Health Potion that he had in his hand.

However, how could Nie Yan let this Berserker get away? He lunged forward and stabbed his dagger into the Berserker's chest, then followed up with Lacerate. His dagger ruthlessly cut into his opponent's flesh. The Berserker's health, which just been replenished, was once again depleted.

Now the Berserker was at low health and suffering from the bleed effect of Lacerate.

"You're courting death!" Nie Yan's movements were so quick that the nearby Paladin had only now reacted. He charged towards Nie Yan and slashed down with his sword, which was burning with a radiant splendor.

Nie Yan had planned on continuing to pursue the Berserker, but the Paladin coming up from behind forced him to change his plans.

Nie Yan's max health wasn't very high, so he didn't dare neglect the oncoming attack. Without a further thought, he dodged to the side, avoiding the blow.

The Paladin quickly put himself between Nie Yan and the Berserker, saving his teammate's life.

“Where is he!?”

“He's over there!”

All of the ten or so members of the Radiant Sacred Flame guild who were in the surrounding area came rushing over. Several of them shot spells in Nie Yan's direction.

When Nie Yan looked at his current situation, he had no choice but to forget about killing the Berserker. Instead of continuing his pursuit, he rolled to the side and dodged the incoming spells. By the time he stood up, the Berserker had already run away.

「Bang! Bang! Bang!」Nie Yan's location was bombarded with spells. Most of them missed their target and harmlessly exploded off the surrounding trees.

However one of them managed to hit Nie Yan.

With the nimbleness of a hare, Nie Yan madly dashed through the thickets and quickly put more than twenty meters between himself and the Mages behind. He would soon be out of their attack range.

At this moment, the Berserker who thought he was a safe distance away from the combat was actually not all that safe.

“Dammit, I’m bleeding!” the Berserker gloomily cursed. His Basic Health Potion was still on cooldown, so he had to resort to drinking a Basic Recovery Potion. However not even the healing from the potion could overcome the constant damage from bleeding.

-5, +3, -5, +3, -5

In the end, his struggle was futile. Five seconds after drinking the potion, the Berserker’s health fell to zero and he died.

With his death, Nie Yan had taken out yet another one of the Radiant Sacred Flame guild’s members!

However the Berserker suffered a bit of injustice in his death. Unlike the others who died in combat, he just watched as his own health bled out until he died.

The Fighter felt a slight chill run down his spine. This Thief by the name of Nie Yan (Nirvana Flame) truly was just too terrifying!

They had no way of restraining him. The Fighter picked up the equipment that the Berserker dropped—a Bronze-grade piece of armour. Thankfully for them, it didn't end up in Nie Yan's hands.

Though Nie Yan had taken out one of his opponents he wasn't out of danger just yet. Up ahead, a Battle Thief and a Paladin blocked his way forward.

Meanwhile, several spells were being launched at him from behind.

Seeing this, Nie Yan hurriedly applied a bandage to himself. +20, +20, +20

「Bang! Bang! Bang!」-23, -22, -20 A bombardment of spells smashed into Nie Yan, interrupting the healing from his bandages.

Nie Yan lowered his head and glanced at his health bar—seventeen health remaining. While doing this he also sucked in his stomach and made some slight maneuvers, causing two attacks to pass through empty air. The Paladin's greatsword had just barely grazed Nie Yan's cheek as it streaked by, and the Battle Thief's dagger had harmlessly cut into the air where his stomach had been moments prior.

What mattered most in a direct confrontation such as this one was who had sharper eyes and quicker hands.

This was because these confrontations would finish in mere

seconds.

Though in this confrontation, it was evident that Nie Yan's skills were much higher.

He broke through the blockade that the Battle Thief and Paladin had formed and disappeared into the thickets. In doing so he had put even more space between himself and his opponents.

“Damn, this bastard's fast!”

“Fuck! We let him escape again!”

They had been unable to gain any sort of advantage against Nie Yan, even when engaging him in close combat. In the end he escaped after taking the Berserker's life, putting the total number of dead to six. One after another, the members of the Radiant Sacred Flame guild were being killed off by Nie Yan.

“Forget it. Let's just head back,” the Fighter suggested. Unexpectedly, he no longer wished to pursue such an abnormal person like Nie Yan any further.

Everyone who heard this looked at each other with gloomy expressions.

“Alright...”

A hint of helplessness could be heard in their tone. Nie Yan had already successfully escaped, so what else could they do?

Thus, the players from the Radiant Sacred Flame guild gathered into groups and departed. While leaving they didn't dare move more than two meters away from their teammates, as they were still fearful that Nie Yan might suddenly emerge from hiding again.

「I killed another one of their members; a Berserker this time. Also their group has just left,」Nie Yan informed Tang Yao.

Despite being encircled by over ten people, Nie Yan was still able to kill one of their members and then successfully escape. What kind of unimaginably impressive feat was this? Tang Yao burned with excitement as he thought about it. He felt it was a pity that he had chosen to be an Arcane Mage instead of a Thief.

「Brother! You should continue taking care of me in the future!」Tang Yao laughed happily. The tree that he could rely on for shade was truly refreshing.

「No problem,」Nie Yan replied straightforwardly. Just as distance determined the stamina of a horse, time would also reveal a person's true nature. When Nie Yan was at his lowest in his past life, he watched as people deserted him left and right. It was then that he finally understood what it truly meant to have a brother. Brothers would always put each other first. Naturally, he would do the same for Tang Yao.

After the players from the Radiant Sacred Flame guild left, Nie Yan made his way over to the cliff face where the Rock Spider Cave was located.

The cave entrance was well hidden and emanated a serene darkness. Who knew where it would lead to? Inside, long strands of silk hung from the cave walls and stalagmites above. This silk resembled a veil of vines as it hid the interior of the cave from view.

This was a Level 5 area. The number of players who were able to train in this area were few.

“Rock Spider Cave huh... this place is pretty good,” Nie Yan muttered to himself as he recollected all the information from his past life regarding the cave.

Brushing away the webs outside, Nie Yan made his way into the cave. As he went deeper, the floor became slightly muddy and the main entrance began branching off into numerous narrow pathways.

Every single one of the Rock Spiders in this area were Level 5 monsters. If he were to face them one on one, then perhaps he would be able to handle them. However, in the event that he encountered more than one, he could only flee for his life.

「Scratch! Scratch!」Sharp cries could be heard reverberating from the depths of the cave until they finally faded away.

All that remained was an eerie chill from the occasional gust of cold wind that blew in from the depths of the cave.

「Tell me your coordinates,」Nie Yan said through the voice call.

「352.238.235. Be careful though, there's over ten Rock Spiders blocking the way here. Are you sure you can reach me?」

「I won't know if I don't try.」Nie Yan glanced at his current coordinates and found that he wasn't far from Tang Yao. After finishing his conversation, he continued to carefully move through the tunnels.

「Scratch! Scratch!」Nie Yan heard a sharp cry echo out from just an earshot away. A nearby Rock Spider had climbed down from the walls and pounced at him.

Nie Yan hurriedly moved backwards after noticing that the spider had launched itself at him. After avoiding the pounce, Nie Yan then stepped forward and retaliated with Concussive Blow.

The Rock Spider sunk into a dazed state.

Rock Spider: Level 5

Health: 108/130

Using the momentum from his previous attack, Nie Yan followed up with several more strikes. In addition, he also used Assassinate,

Lacerate, and Vital Strike.

The Rock Spider continuously threw itself at Nie Yan and attacked. It was two levels higher than him, and thus its damage was fairly high. Every attack that hit dealt at least thirty damage to him.

Nie Yan started falling back while still keeping the Rock Spider within his attack range. As he retreated, he would repeatedly stab his dagger into the spider. After twenty seconds of fighting like this, the spider collapsed on the ground and let out a miserable shriek.

Nie Yan used this short respite to glance at his health bar. He only had around twenty percent remaining. It appeared even a single Rock Spider was still a danger to him. However there was one upside to fighting them: Rock Spiders granted a great deal of experience upon death. Each spider gave two hundred and eighty experience. The amount alone was quite generous.

The only downside was that no useful drops came from these Rock Spiders.

Nie Yan sat down to rest and then ate some bread. Slowly but surely, his health recovered to full and all his skills came off cooldown.

With his health recovered and skills once again ready for use, Nie Yan stood up and continued advancing into the darkness of the cave. Up ahead, he noticed three Rock Spiders moving about. After

observing the location of each spider, Nie Yan took out his crossbow. He moved close to the nearby wall and aimed at the closest Rock Spider.

「Whoosh! Whoosh! Whoosh!」A line of bolts pierced through the air as they shot out towards their target.

-5, -3, -5

Three damage values floated upward above the spider's head.

After taking the hits, the spider rushed over to where Nie Yan was hiding.「Scratch! Scratch!」It let out a furious shriek as it pounced towards the one who had injured it.

With this, Nie Yan had succeeded in drawing out a single Rock Spider without alerting its companions. When the spider neared his location, he drew his dagger and rushed out to greet it. The two engaged in close combat, with Nie Yan dishing out consecutive attacks. As they fought, numerous damage values appeared one after another above the spider's head.

Within twenty seconds, the Rock Spider was dead. Surprisingly, this spider had dropped something. Nie Yan walked over and picked up the loot: a single copper...

After waiting for his health to recover, Nie Yan used his crossbow to draw out the other spiders and kill them one by one, just as he had earlier.

Using this tactic, he continued to make his way forward. By the time he finally arrived at Tang Yao's coordinates, several more spiders had died by his hands. Up ahead there was a wide area where many tunnels intersected. In that area no less than ten Rock Spiders could be seen wandering around.

Nie Yan didn't immediately rush in; instead he just observed the surroundings. It seemed as though passing through this area safely would be quite difficult. Especially considering that he might draw out more than one spider if he were to use his crossbow like before.

Two of them, huh... Can't say for sure if I'll be able to deal with them, Nie Yan thought to himself. He did have one plan in mind, but it required the use of one of his bandages. There was a problem with this plan though: he didn't have many bandages left. Not to mention that a single Intermediate Combat Bandage would cost him upwards of twenty coppers in materials. An average person would be hard-pressed to use even a single one due to the high cost.

Chapter 25 – Silver Chest

Numerous spiders had converged within the wide space where the tunnels intersected. They were constantly patrolling the area, which meant that their positions were ever-changing.

Nie Yan patiently waited for an opportunity to arise. He didn't need to wait long; about half a minute later, the spiders began congregating towards the center. It was then that Nie Yan noticed there was one lone spider that had lagged behind. It loitered off to the side, not too far from where he was.

Nie Yan's eyes lit up; this was his chance! There was no time to lose. He raised his crossbow, aimed at the lone spider, and fired.

「Pa! Pa! Pa!」Three crossbow bolts lodged themselves into their target, enraging it. The spider immediately turned to face its aggressor and charged.

Fortunately, none of the other spiders followed, thus, Nie Yan welcomed its assault with open arms.

When their skirmish reached its conclusion, the spider fell to the ground, dead. Nie Yan walked over to its corpse and picked up the single piece of equipment it dropped as loot: a White-grade Level 5 Dark Leather Thief Tunic.

The drop rates for equipment were extremely low regardless of which profession it belonged to, to the extent that prices for equipment always remained high. For instance, if this leather

tunic were to be placed on the marketplace, it would sell for at least six or seven coppers.

Nie Yan tossed the leather tunic into his knapsack, then went back to waiting for another opportunity.

Within the span of roughly six minutes, he had drawn out and killed another three spiders. Afterward, Nie Yan tallied up the remaining monsters and found that there were still twelve remaining.

Unfortunately, these spiders were clumped too closely to be drawn out one at a time.

Nie Yan searched for quite some time but was unable to find a suitable position to repeat his earlier tactics.

Hmm... this seems to be the best position, though it's still a bit lacking. I suppose I'll give it a shot from here, though things might get a little dangerous.

Nie Yan raised his crossbow once more and fired. Subsequently, three bolts were sent piercing through the air.

-5, -5, -5

These bolts struck the body of a nearby Rock Spider.「Scratch! Scratch!」The spider furiously cried out as it charged towards the one who had harmed it. Unlike the previous spiders he had lured,

however, this one was being followed closely from behind by another.

I aggroed two of them... Nie Yan's heart tightened as he made a hasty retreat back to one of the narrow tunnels within the cave. [The narrowness of this passage](#) meant there would be no room for two spiders to move side by side.

When they drew close enough, Nie Yan pulled out his dagger. He directly engaged the Rock Spider he had aggroed first and unleashed a continuous chain of attack upon it.

The spider repeatedly lunged at Nie Yan. One after another, a line of damage values floated up above Nie Yan's head as they exchanged blows.

Ninety-two percent, eighty-seven percent, seventy-two percent... Slowly but surely, Nie Yan's health continued to fall.

While in combat, Nie Yan made sure to maintain awareness of both his surroundings and the positioning of his footsteps. Currently, the only spider capable of attacking him in the narrow tunnel was the one he aggroed first. As for its partner, who had closely followed from behind, it could do nothing more than cry out helplessly.

The spider met its end when Nie Yan finally finished it off with Vital Strike. He glanced at his health bar—around a quarter of his health remained—then quickly retreated back from his current position

Almost immediately after the first spider was killed, its ally who had been helplessly crying from behind lunged forward.

Seeing this, Nie Yan hastened his retreat and began applying a Combat Bandage.

+20... +20... +20...

With each passing second, his health was being restored by a large amount.

The Rock Spider repeatedly lunged at Nie Yan as the latter dodged and leaped back in retreat. However, he soon reached an impasse. Approximately five meters behind him, there was another spider. If Nie Yan were to continue moving like he was, then it would undoubtedly be aggroed. Thus, retreating was no longer an option. By this time, his health had been restored to eighty percent, so he raised his dagger and ran forward to face the spider head-on.

The two parties finally met and clashed. Unfortunately, all of Nie Yan's skills had yet to come off cooldown. Met with such a situation, all he could do was lash out with regular stabs and slashes.

After evading the spider's lunge, Nie Yan would step forward and counter with successive attacks.

Under the barrage of violent attacks from the spider, Nie Yan's health was quickly dropping. Whereas the spider currently had over sixty percent of its health remaining, Nie Yan only had a third left. In the end, the damage that could be dealt with regular attacks was rather limited. After all, Thieves were a profession that relied heavily on their skills to deal damage.

Twenty seconds later...

Assassinate, Lacerate, and Vital Strike had finally come off cooldown.

For Nie Yan, this was undoubtedly a great boon.

Not even a moment later, the Rock Spider came leaping forward while baring its fangs.

This is my chance!

Nie Yan slipped his dagger past the spider's legs and aimed directly for its head—all while it was still leaping through the air. After his dagger was implanted deeply within the spider's eye, Nie Yan used the momentum to ruthlessly slash outwards, causing a thick green liquid to ooze from its mutilated head.

Despite this, the Rock Spider still managed to use one of its legs to pierce through Nie Yan's shoulder, dealing thirty-three damage and sending a number floating above his head.

Nie Yan quickly glanced at his health bar and found that he had a little over a tenth of his health remaining.

That was dangerous!

+30

He had hastily pulled out a Basic Health Potion and gulped down its contents. His last hit with Vital Strike had taken out thirty-nine points from the spider's health, but the fight still wasn't over. The Rock Spider dashed towards Nie Yan with the intent of ramming into him.

When the two collided, the spider crashed into Nie Yan's chest and dealt thirty-five damage to him.

After receiving the blow, Nie Yan quickly retreated back several steps.

The Rock Spider turned its body to face where its opponent had retreated.

Nie Yan swept his eyes over the spider's health bar and noticed it that only had fifteen health remaining. In comparison, after drinking the Basic Health Potion and taking the spider's attack directly, he barely had a tenth of his health left. Right now if one of the spider's attacks were to even slightly graze him, then he would likely meet his end.

He quickly took several more steps back as the spider lunged in pursuit.

If he were to engage this spider, and if their battle was to be anything like the last, then it would be a mutually assured destruction.

-5... -5...

As the spider pounced forward, two damage values popped up above its head one after another.

In its final moments, the spiders raised its forelimbs and attempted to stab Nie Yan as its lumbering body descended forward.

Nie Yan instantly reacted and dodged the spider's final attack by rolling.「Crash!」The spider's body smashed into the ground beside him, creating a large pit in the earth.

If he had been just a millisecond too slow, then he would've been struck by that attack. Nie Yan broke out into a cold sweat as he thought of how he had just narrowly escaped death.

-5

Finally, the spider's health had been bled dry. The legs that had

been struggling to get up earlier suddenly lost all their ability to support the main body, causing the spider to collapse to the ground.

「System: You've gained 280 experience points.」

The second Rock Spider had finally met its end... using this short respite, Nie Yan breathed a sigh of relief. Using both arms to support himself, he pushed his body off the ground and propped himself up against the cave wall. Soon, his health gradually started to recover.

Pitifully, this spider hadn't dropped even a single item upon death. What's worse was that he had been forced to expend a Combat Bandage against a common mob like this Rock Spider. The cost of crafting a single bandage was such that the payout of this battle wasn't worth his efforts.

After a few moments of rest, his health was at last fully restored. That was just too dangerous... If I'm going to lure out more Rock Spiders, then I should definitely avoid aggroing more than one of them at a time.

Nie Yan picked himself up off the ground and walked over to the intersection. There was a lot more space to maneuver there now, as only ten spiders remained.

However, these ten spiders were moving together in groups of two or three, which made it incredibly difficult for Nie Yan to find an opportunity to strike.

At least there's more room to move around now... I should be able to use Stealth to make my way through here. At Stealth's current level, I should be able to pass within a meter of these spiders without being detected.

Gradually, Nie Yan's body became increasingly transparent until it completely blended in with the darkness of the cave. Shortly after, he began to slowly make his way forward.

As he moved, Nie Yan spotted three spiders approaching him from behind. One was off to his left, about three meters away. The other two were off to his right, about five meters away.

Nie Yan carefully observed the positions of each spider and determined their patrol routes as he continued moving ahead.

Suddenly, two spiders crawled until they were just two meters away from his current position. Seeing this, Nie Yan quickly halted his footsteps. After a short period of time, the two spiders slowly moved on without having noticed his presence.

While Nie Yan was moving forward, he suddenly happened to spot something over in the corner of the room. Nestled between several large rocks was a single chest that faintly glowed with a silver light.

The rocks had obstructed his line of view, thus he was only able to see the edge of the silver chest.

Son of a b*tch... they really hid it well.

Unexpectedly, it's a silver treasure chest! Nie Yan's heart rate involuntarily sped up.

At the same time, three spiders abruptly halted their movements and looked around.

These actions were akin to a bucket of cold water being dumped over his head, causing him to immediately calm down. Right now, it was still too soon to get excited. The duration of Stealth was finite, and he couldn't afford the luxury of spending the time to open the chest. Thus, he was forced to give up on the chest and leave it for another time.

Nie Yan maintained his breathing,

Having not discovered anything, the three spiders resumed their patrols and crawled further and further away.

Nie Yan carefully crept his way around the remaining spiders until finally making it out of danger. He breathed a sigh of relief. This kind of work definitely wasn't suited for an average person.

After proceeding forward for a while longer, Nie Yan glanced at his coordinates. Finally, I'm here!

“Tang Yao, where are you?”

The next moment, a figure slowly emerged from the nearby shadows. Who knew what hole this guy had deeply burrowed himself into? By the time he finally crawled out, his body was completely covered in dirt.

“Haha, not bad... you hid yourself pretty well,” Nie Yan said with a smile.

Tang Yao patted the dirt off his body and gloomily replied, “Don’t say anymore... Anyways, there were so many Rock Spiders over there. How’d you manage to get through?”

“Stealth,” Nie Yan answered back.

‘You can even do that?’ Tang Yao’s mind went blank for a moment. That intersection was littered with Rock Spiders. How the hell could a Thief Stealth their way through that? It was an incredibly difficult task to pull off!

Chapter 26 – Locked Chest

“Why wouldn’t I be able to?” Nie Yan chuckled as he sent Tang Yao a trade request. After the latter accepted, he placed the Fire Chaser set and a single Return Scroll inside the trade window.

“Y-you’re giving all of this to me?” Tang Yao stared out with a blank face. He never thought the Fire Chaser set would have such high property bonuses.

“I got these off of Dian Cang when they dropped from his corpse. There was a staff among those items as well, but it’s not suited for you. Anyways, take this Fire Chaser set with you. As for the Return Scroll... don’t use it just yet, I want you to stay here with me for a bit,” Nie Yan replied. He and Tang Yao were brothers who had known each other since childhood. To put it simply, compared to their friendship, this Fire Chaser set didn’t amount to much.

“Mhmm... alright. I guess I can’t refuse.” A hint of anticipation flashed through Tang Yao’s eyes.

After donning the Fire Chaser set, Tang Yao’s outer appearance improved significantly. If he were to go out now, he would undoubtedly attract many women.

“What’s your magic damage at now?” Nie Yan asked.

“Fifty.” To Tang Yao, this amount was something he couldn’t even imagine reaching in the past.

“Not bad, you should be able to run some of the harder dungeons and quests with that much. Though it seems your current weapon is still a bit lacking. You should try and find yourself a better one when you return to town,” Nie Yan suggested. Tang Yao receiving this Fire Chaser set for free so suddenly was tantamount to Nie Yan helping him reach the Heavens with a single step. The path he would need to walk in the future had become a lot shorter.

Tang Yao kept gazing at the current equipment he was wearing, seemingly unable to stop himself from admiring it.

“Let’s stay here and train for a bit. There’s a silver treasure chest up ahead and I want you to tag along and help me retrieve it. Here, I’ll make the party.” With how high Tang Yao’s damage was now, killing Rock Spiders in this cave would be a piece of cake.

There was a treasure chest just waiting to be opened. If he didn’t retrieve whatever was inside today, then he wouldn’t be able to sleep soundly at night.

“Silver chest, where!?” Tang Yao began burning with excitement. Up until now, he had only ever managed to find and open a single chest, not to mention, it was only a common white one. He had never even seen a silver chest before, let alone seen one.

“Let’s clear out those Rock Spiders back at that intersection first,” Nie Yan replied. Now, with Tang Yao’s assistance, there would be a lot less pressure on him when dealing with two Rock

Spiders. Even three Rock Spiders might not even pose a challenge.

After arriving at the intersection, Nie Yan took out his crossbow and loaded it. Then he took aim at a nearby spider and fired, sending three bolts flying out of the crossbow in quick succession.

「Pa! Pa! Pa!」He ended up aggroing two Rock Spiders with his attack—the one that was hit and its companion in tow. Nie Yan positioned himself in the front while Tang Yao brandished his staff and released an Arcane Fireball and Arcane Blaze from the rear. Every spell he launched would deal over thirty or so damage. Occasionally, he would even score a critical hit, causing two fifties to appear.

“They’re two levels above me, yet I’m able to deal this kind of damage...?” Tang Yao exclaimed while seemingly in a daze. His own damage output had shocked him.

Under the combined efforts of their attacks, the two spiders collapsed on the ground by the time Nie Yan’s health had fallen to around fifty percent.

Afterward, the two victors took the time to rest up. While Nie Yan sat down and recovered his health, Tang Yao took out some Spring Water and used it to replenish his mana.

“What’s your experience at?” Nie Yan asked as he stood up, his health having fully recovered.

“Level 3, 56%. How about you?” Tang Yao replied. He had played for over a week to get to this level.

“Level 3, 9%.” Leveling in Conviction was extremely difficult. Each level required an insane amount of experience to level up. Considering that he had just started playing a few days ago, his leveling speed was fast enough to frighten someone. Not even two days had passed and he was already Level 3. If word were to get out, it would definitely frighten many people.

While they chatted, Nie Yan used his crossbow to lure out another two spiders and killed them. Repeating this tactic, the entire area was soon completely cleared of monsters.

Nie Yan bent down and picked up an item that had dropped from the last Rock Spider. It was a Charge skill book for Warriors. Hmm... The market price for a Charge skill book should be around twenty some coppers right now.

Indeed, the drop rate in a Level 5 area is much higher compared to the low-level ones.

“What’d it drop?”

“A Charge skill book.”

Tang Yao waved his hands and said, “I’m pretty satisfied with just this Fire Chaser set, so you can take all the drops. Besides, I won’t need to start looking for new equipment until I reach Level

5.”

To Nie Yan, however, a single skill book wasn't of much value either. In the end, he didn't even try to argue with Tang Yao and threw the Charge skill book into his knapsack.

Since the two of them were in a party, they had to share the experience gained through combat. Thanks to Tang Yao's high damage, however, their pace had sped up significantly. Therefore they were gaining experience at a much faster rate than when they were by themselves, which made up for the fact that it was being shared.

With the spiders all cleared out, Nie Yan walked over to where he had spotted the chest earlier.

As he neared its location, he discovered many strange engravings and patterns etched into the top of the chest. These designs were extremely elaborate. In addition, there was a lock on this chest that kept it firmly sealed.

“Damn, I haven't learned the Lockpicking yet.” Lockpicking was a skill that could only be learned after reaching Level 5. Not to mention, the skill book that taught it was extremely expensive as well. And since this was a Level 5 map, a locked chest appearing wouldn't be unexpected.

“Well, what are we going to do then?” Tang Yao asked. This was the first time he had ever come across a silver chest, and it was going to end with this kind of outcome?

“Let’s leave it for now and try to get to Level 5 as quickly as possible. Who knows? By that time, that chest might still be here,” Nie Yan helplessly replied.

Just as Nie Yan and Tang Yao were preparing to leave and go back to training, a nearby boulder suddenly began trembling.

“W-what’s that?” Tang Yao asked after being startled.

The trembling boulder was quite large, roughly twice the size of an ordinary Rock Spider, and had a hard and coarse surface. Had it not been trembling, it would’ve perfectly blended in with the numerous other boulders that were strewn about the area.

Abruptly, eight legs extended out of this ‘boulder’ as it stood up. Once it was fully upright, it gradually opened its eyes, revealing eight mossy green lights.「Scratch! Scratch!」It let out a shrill cry. The boulder was actually a Rock Spider!

“It’s a Leader-class Rock Spider!” Nie Yan’s heart tightened. He immediately entered stealth and made his way around it, positioning himself behind its back.

Elite Rock Spider: Level 5

Leader-class Monster

Health: 180/180

The spider glanced at its surrounds and quickly locked its gaze onto Tang Yao's position.

Tang Yao looked back at the spider and saw his own image being reflected in its eyes. This, combined with the spider's sinister appearance, was especially terrifying to him. He immediately turned back and began to retreat.

“What are we gonna do!? This is a Level 5 Leader-class Rock Spider!” Tang Yao nervously exclaimed. The strongest mob he'd ever encountered up until now was a measly Level 3 Leader-class. Not to mention, this was his first time entering a Level 5 area and unexpectedly, he had already come across such a powerful opponent.

“Kill it! Blast it with magic!” Nie Yan answered back. It was far more dangerous to try and run instead of fighting it. They would most definitely die while trying to escape. In addition, there was also the possibility of aggroing other spiders while on the run. As for escaping with a Return Scroll, it required twenty seconds to activate and would cancel upon being hit, which meant that it was out of the question as well. Under these circumstances, they were better off fighting it.

Would the two of them even be able to kill a Level 5 Leader-class monster? Tang Yao was skeptical.

“Make sure you get far away from it, at least twenty meters. Then find a narrow tunnel and bunker down inside. Don't run too far in, though, otherwise you might aggro some more spiders!” Nie Yan warned. Tang Yao was still a novice and entrusting him with

such a dangerous task would be difficult.

In this situation, Nie Yan was perfectly safe and could escape at any time. As for Tang Yao, however, Nie Yan couldn't guarantee his survival if he were to fight.

Thus, they could only resign themselves to fate.

「Scratch! Scratch!」The Rock Spider furiously cried out as it charged towards Tang Yao.

“Oh... for fucks sake!” Tang Yao hurriedly sped up his pace. While running, he followed Nie Yan's advice and fired an Arcane Fireball at it.

「Bang!」The fireball exploded when it crashed into the spider's body and dealt eighteen damage, causing a damage value to float above its head.

Its defense was absurd! Fire magic was supposed to deal bonus damage to Rock Spiders, but even so, the damage was still just too low!

However, this was to be expected. It was a Leader-class monster after all, so the damage was still alright. There's my chance! Nie Yan's eyes lit up as he struck the back of the Rock Spider with a Smothering Strike.

The spider trembled and stopped in place.

It's only going to be stunned three seconds!

Normally, Smothering Strike would daze an enemy for six seconds, but this Rock Spider was a Leader-class monster! It had a certain resistance to crowd control effects. Thus, Nie Yan's control skills were only half as effective against it. Regardless, these three seconds were still more than enough!

"Hit it! Don't just stand there and watch!" Nie Yan shouted.

Upon hearing Nie Yan, Tang Yao immediately cast Arcane Blaze. 「Boom!」The fiery blaze exploded when it hit the spider's body.

When the spider woke from its dazed state, Nie Yan took the initiative and struck out with Assassinate. After using his dagger to stab into its fleshy abdomen, he followed through with Lacerate and slashed outward.

His attack opened up a gaping hole on the spider's underside where a thick green liquid began oozing out.

Even though Nie Yan had begun attacking, the spider was still aggroed onto Tang Yao. After coming out of its dazed state, it continued its pursuit.

Seeing this, Tang Yao rapidly retreated into a narrow passage. 「Bam!」The spider's immense body rammed itself into the opening of the passage, but couldn't make it in. The surrounding walls

trembled from this, causing several rocks to break from the ceiling and come crashing down to the ground.

「Scratch! Scratch!」The spider cried out furiously as it tried to squeeze its massive body into the passage.

“Come and see how this elder will take care of you!” After realizing the spider couldn’t enter, Tang Yao suddenly became much more courageous. He brandished his staff and fired off an Arcane Missile, then followed up with an Arcane Fireball. “Dammit! Arcane Missile is only dealing half as much damage as an Arcane Fireball.”

The cooldown for Arcane Missile was very short because it was a regular spell. The casting time was quite short as well, requiring only a single second. Meanwhile, Arcane Fireball had a ten-second cooldown and required three seconds to cast. So it was impossible for him to continuously cast Arcane Fireball.

As Tang Yao fired off spells, the Rock Spider continued to unceasingly ram itself into the entrance of the passageway, causing the walls on both sides to shake. Soon cracks began emerging in the walls, and the ceiling of the passageway gradually began to show signs of a possible collapse.

Chapter 27 – Meteor

Not only was Tang Yao the first one to attack the Leader class Rock Spider, but he was also the one putting out the most damage. It was because of this that the spider's aggro had been firmly placed on him. Meanwhile, the spider had completely ignored Nie Yan who was attacking it with a combination of skills, leaving the latter behind as it continued pursuing Tang Yao. Nie Yan took advantage of the current situation and, while the spider was still distracted by Tang Yao, fished out the vial of poison within his knapsack and used it to coat his dagger.

Five seconds later, he finished applying the poison. He approached the spider from the rear and stabbed his dagger into its abdomen while using Vital Strike.

-10% Defense

-52

The Rock Spider became poisoned and a status debuff was applied.

Additionally, Nie Yan's Vital Strike was a critical hit and dealt quite a bit of damage!

「Scratch! Scratch!」The spider shrieked out in pain. It switched its focus to Nie Yan and pounced towards him.

The spider's sudden change in targets caught Nie Yan off guard, forcing him to hastily fall back.

-78

Despite his attempts to flee, however, the Rock Spider's attack still managed to connect—draining the larger half of his health. Seeing his health bar quickly deplete, Nie Yan didn't dare to be careless. He immediately fished out a Basic Health Potion and downed it, then rolled away and began retreating.

The spider followed in pursuit.

With the spider's attention elsewhere, Tang Yao was free to fire off a salvo of spells. He sent off Arcane Missile, Arcane Blaze and Arcane Fireball in quick succession.

"I'm going to be out of mana soon..." Tang Yao glanced at his health and mana bars and found that he had roughly a quarter of his mana remaining. His mana expenditure was too ferocious, there was simply no chance his natural regeneration could keep up.

"Do you have any Mana Potions?" Nie Yan asked.

"I have a Basic Mana Potion."

"Then hurry up and drink it. We'll deal with it later," Nie Yan

instructed. When he turned back to face the Rock Spider, he found that it had already neared his position. In response, he brandished his dagger and struck out with Concussive Blow, forcing the charging spider to abruptly halt its movements. Nie Yan took advantage of this and put some more space between himself and the spider.

Even though the spider had been struck by Concussive Blow, it still managed to land an attack during the exchange. Nie Yan glanced at his health bar and found that roughly an eighth remained. Seeing this, he hurriedly used a Combat Bandage on himself.

+20... +20... +20...

During all this, Tang Yao had fished out a bottle filled with a blue liquid from his knapsack and drank it. Drinking the potion actually gave him a slight heartache; not because of the potion itself, but because that single bottle of blue liquid was worth ten coppers. To him, it was a life-saving treasure, one that he wouldn't use even in dire circumstances.

Tang Yao's mana was instantly restored to ninety percent. With his mana now replenished, he unleashed several spells in succession. Each and everyone of them exploded on contact, dealing a high amount of damage.

Before two seconds had even passed, the Rock Spider woke from its dazed state. Upon waking, it immediately abandoned its attempt to pursue Nie Yan and instead rushed towards Tang Yao.

Its aggro had shifted once again.

“Keep at it! It’s almost dead!” Nie Yan shouted. Once his health was fully restored from the Combat Bandages, he rushed to the spider’s side once again.

The damage He and Tang Yao were dealing was by no means low. Even though their opponent was a Level 5 Leader-class monster, it was still unable to withstand this kind of assault. By now, it only had a little over ten percent of its health remaining.

「Scritch! Scritch!」The spider cried out manically as its entire body suddenly turned a shade of crimson red.

“Not good! This son of a b*tch became enraged. Keep your distance and be careful of its attacks,” Nie Yan nervously shouted.

Even though Tang Yao still didn’t understand what was going on, he followed Nie Yan’s instructions regardless and began hastily retreating while continuing to cast spells.

During his retreat, a spike jutted out from the ground below and pierced towards him.

Fortunately, Tang Yao was still moving when this rock spike emerged, and as such, it only managed to barely graze him. However, this slight scratch still dealt thirty-two damage to his health.

If this rock spike had hit Tang Yao directly, Nie Yan estimated that he would've lost at least two-thirds of his health.

The attack nearly frightened Tang Yao to death, but the fact that he survived made him rejoice inside.

“Keep running and don't stop. Oh, and make sure to avoid stepping on any areas where you see the ground trembling or cracking!” Nie Yan shouted. If Tang Yao paused for even a moment, then he would meet his end.

Sure enough, as soon as Nie Yan finished talking, more rock spikes began jutting out from the ground. Tang Yao listened to Nie Yan's advice and paid close attention to the earth beneath his feet, occasionally dodging from side to side. Even so, aside from the first rock spike, not a single one managed to hit him.

Tang Yao couldn't help but wonder how Nie Yan discovered this method for dodging the rock spikes. Could it be that he had slain a Leader-class Rock Spider in the past?

In the end, he put this thought in the back of his head and concentrated solely on evading the rock spikes erupting beneath his feet. He would occasionally see an opportunity to attack with a spell or two, but he never had the time to act.

The spider seemed to become even more enraged as it watched attack after attack miss. It began to unceasingly ram itself into the tunnel walls in anger. Suddenly...「Crash!!」The walls finally

crumbled and collapsed. The spider climbed over the pile of rubble and rushed inside the tunnel, pouncing towards Tang Yao.

“Run quickly!” Nie Yan shouted.

“I can’t, there’s another Rock Spider behind me! If I run any further I’ll end up aggroing it!” Tang Yao nervously called out as he looked back at the spider’s immense body which was fast approaching.

Nie Yan looked at the spider’s health bar. Five percent... it only had a sliver of life left!

“It’s fine! Keep running!” Nie Yan shouted as he checked his skill bar. By now, several of his skills had come off cooldown.

He chased after the spider and arrived near its rear.

Assassinate! Lacerate!

-2, -3

It still has two percent remaining!

Vital Strike!

Nie Yan lunged forward and pierced his dagger into the spider’s

abdomen.

「Scratch! Scratch!」The spider let out a miserable shriek as it fell to the ground with a heavy crash. The impact made the entire cave tremble and shake.

“We finally killed it.” Nie Yan finally relaxed as he breathed a sigh of relief. He walked over to the Rock Spider’s corpse and picked up the loot.

“Hey, over here! I’ve still got one chasing me!!” Tang Yao ran over to Nie Yan with a smaller Rock Spider in tow him. When he was evading the Leader class Rock Spider just a moment ago, he was unable to avoid alerting one of the spiders in the area. Thankfully it was only a common monster.

Tang Yao ran behind Nie Yan and let the latter hold back the spider while he cast spells from the back.

The two made short work of the spider, and it soon collapsed on the floor.

“My God... I’m going to die of exhaustion.” Tang panted as he propped himself up against a nearby wall and began to slowly recover his health and mana. How they ever managed to kill this Leader-class Rock Spider, which was two levels above them, was beyond him. Nonetheless, it was most likely his greatest achievement since starting the game, “You know... I think I’ve just realised how awesome I actually am.”

Nie Yan took out the two items that the Leader-class Rock Spider had dropped: a single skill book and a silver white key.

Skill Book: Meteor

Skill Description: Beckon forth meteors to smite your enemies.

Required: One syllable, three gestures, and one talisman.

Skill Attribute: (Beginner) Summon five meteors. Each meteor deals five bonus damage; ten points of burn damage in a five-by-five meter area.

Skill Cooldown: 120 s

User Restriction: Elementalist, Arcane Mage; can only be learned by the Righteous Faction that protects the light.

This was an uncommon Arcane Mage skill book and an extremely rare one at that. At the Beginner level, it could summon blazing fireballs that would rain down from the sky like meteors. Each fireball could strike five targets within a designated area simultaneously. At later levels, it would become a powerful area-wide spell.

“Even something like this can drop...? You lucky son of a b*tch.” Nie Yan was almost speechless. The Meteor skill was exceedingly rare, as it could only be found in Level 1 to 30 areas where Rum Spiders, Rock Spiders, and Flame Spiders spawned. Moreover, it

would only drop from Leader-class or higher versions of said monsters. What's worse was that the drop rate for this skill wasn't more than one in ten thousand. With the current level of the majority of the player base, this skill would be priceless in the marketplace. They really did meet with an unexpected success today. As for the rare drop, it was most likely due to killing a Leader-class monster that was two levels higher than them.

“What did it drop?” Tang Yao asked in surprise.

“Looks like your luck isn't half-bad today. It dropped a Meteor skill book. At the Beginner level, it serves as an unparalleled area of effect skill, dealing high damage in a small area. At the later levels, it becomes a pretty decent mobbing skill.” Nie Yan felt a slight hint of envy as he summarized the skill to Tang Yao. An Arcane Mage acquiring Meteor during the first two weeks of the game... This truly was too much of a blessing.

“Really?” Tang Yao suddenly stood up in surprise. “Let me see!”

“It's not bad. You can use it. But compared to Templar magic, Giant magic, or Dragon magic, it's still somewhat lacking.” Nie Yan threw the Meteor skill book over to Tang Yao and then looked at the other item that had dropped.

Silver Key: Used to open Level 0–20 treasure chests that are Silver or lower.

Uses remaining: 3/3

“What’s Templar magic and Dragon magic?”

“You’ll find out in the future. For now just take this Meteor skill book; I’ll be taking the key,” Nie Yan replied. He and Tang Yao would both be getting the items most useful for themselves. Nevertheless, the key was still better in Nie Yan’s hands, because only he would be able to get the most value out of it. Not to mention that, with this key, he could now finally open that locked silver treasure chest.

“If that’s the case, I won’t be polite!” Tang Yao went ahead and learned Meteor. Afterwards, when he read the skill’s description, he felt extremely satisfied. He had been thoroughly depressed due to being pursued by the Radiant Sacred Flame guild all day. Who would’ve guessed that Nie Yan’s arrival would’ve completely reversed his dire situation, turning all of his sorrows into joy in the process.

Chapter 28 – Ring Of Woven Silk

Nie Yan walked over to the silver treasure chest and began unlocking it with the Silver Key.

「System: Opening treasure chest... Estimated Completion: 20%... 50%...」

「Click!」The chest was unlocked.

He glanced at the key which now had its durability reduced from three to two. Not bad... I can still use this two more times. Nie Yan threw the key into his knapsack and then started to feel around the inside of the chest. Eventually, he grasped an item; it was small, round, and felt smooth inside his hand. It's a ring! Nie Yan's surprise echoed in his thoughts as he fished out the item from the chest.

The band had an ashy gray colour and he found it difficult to discern what material it was crafted from. Upon the [setting](#) attached to one side of the band sat an opaque white jewel adorned at the very center. Engraved on this opaque white jewel was the image of a spider. Despite its small size, the engraving was vivid and lifelike. It made it appear as though a jade white spider truly did exist within this jewel.

Ring of Woven Silk

Properties: Unidentified

“It’s a Ring of Woven Silk!” Nie Yan gasped in surprise.

The Ring of Woven Silk was a Bronze-tier accessory that could only be found in areas where spider type monsters spawned. Moreover, it was a ring that retained its usefulness all the way up to Level 60. This was due to the ring’s unique properties; it could shoot out a tough resilient thread of spider silk that adhered to most surfaces and could extend up to ten feet in length. In essence, it was the perfect treasure for scaling or jumping over obstacles such as rooftops, walls, ledges, or trees.

“What’s a Ring of Woven Silk?” Tang Yao asked in bewilderment.

Nie Yan faintly smiled and replied, “Just look at the craftsmanship. It should be at least a Silver-tier accessory.”

Although the properties of this ring were yet to be appraised, he was able to discern the grade of equipment like this just by glancing at the name.

“Oh... so it was a Silver-grade accessory? No wonder you were so excited!” Tang Yao replied as he came to a sudden realization.

From Nie Yan’s perspective, this Ring of Woven Silk was much more valuable than the Meteor skill book. This was because this

ring would make him significantly, therefore he would have plenty more options to consider when working towards a specific goal. In his heart, he couldn't help but think: Now if only I can get a hold of that jewel from the Treant King, then everything will be perfect.

“A friend of mine invited me to run the Treant Forest with her tomorrow and there's still a few open spots. Do you want to join?”

“Sure, but... would they even agree to have me?” Tang Yao asked in a somewhat anxious tone. He and his friends had wanted to form a team and run a dungeon in the past; however, not a single team wanted them or agreed to let them join.

“No worries, you have me with you after all. Besides, your magic damage is fifty now. Such a high damage Arcane Mage... even if they wanted to find one they wouldn't be able to. Have some confidence in yourself. You're my brother after all!” Nie Yan smiled and patted Tang Yao on the shoulder.

“Understood! If you have any more advice to give, then please let me know now. Whatever you tell me, I'll practice it. I don't believe there's anything I can't learn!” After listening to Nie Yan's words, Tang Yao was in high spirits after feeling touch by Nie Yan's words.

“Well, I've already told you all that you need to know in regards to improving your skills. The most crucial aspect now is whether you've practiced enough or not. As long as you practice, improve your reaction time, and put in the effort to avoid making any large mistakes, you'll have nothing to worry about. Try finding people to duel with early in the day to improve your skills. When you get

to Level 5, I'll find some people and we'll form a team to run the Secret Cavern. There I'll help you grab the Arcane Mage's Exile Disciple set. I'll have you so satisfied, you'll explode from happiness," Nie Yan said. With him here, it would be difficult for Tang Yao not to become an expert—even if he didn't want to.

"Really? Then it won't do if I don't make an effort!" Tang Yao was now full of motivation. In the past, he felt it didn't matter how much he practiced his skills because in the end, he would never catch up to the people who were considered elites. However now, after listening to Nie Yan's words, he felt a bright future lay ahead of him.

Afterward, Nie Yan gave Yao Yao a call through voice chat.

「What do you want?」Yao Yao asked in an annoyed tone. In truth, she was no longer angry at Nie Yan. When she answered the call, however, she pretended to still be angry with him.

「Do you still have any extra spaces for Treant Forest tomorrow?」Nie Yan smiled helplessly.

「Two more open spaces.」

「I have a friend who I want to bring along. Are you guys willing to take him?」

「What level is your friend, hmm? He's not joining just to leech experience, is he...? Cause if he is, I'll have to ask my Senior Sister

first. Also, what profession does this friend of yours play?」Yao Yao answered in an abrasive tone.

「Arcane Mage.」

「Oh...? What's his magic damage?」

「Over fifty. To be more accurate, it's fifty-two.」

「His damage is that high!?」Yao Yao exclaimed in surprise. Her magic damage as a Holy Mage was only at thirty-seven—a number which was considered to be quite high among others at the same level. She never expected that Nie Yan's friend would possess more magic damage than her, and by such a large margin at that.「Hold on, I'll go ask my Senior Sister. She'll most likely agree to it.」

For an Arcane Mage to possess such high magic damage, they definitely must've cleared many dungeons in the past. These people were top experts. Even if you found one and begged them to join, they still might not necessarily agree to join you. And now one of these experts has been delivered right to their doorstep. Her Senior Sister would have absolutely no reason to refuse. Normally it would be quite the opposite, with Tang Yao being the one doing the refusing or accepting.

「Alright, go and ask. I'll be waiting for your reply.」

A few moments later, she sent a reply.「I've asked Big Sister Yu Lan. She agreed to let your friend join, so bring him with you when

you come tomorrow morning.」

「Mhm... alright.」Nie Yan nodded his head and hung up the call.

「[Doot! Doot!](#)」

“Hello? Hello?” Yao Yao still wanted to ask Nie Yan why his friend would even want to join them. From their perspective, this kind of expert wasn’t easy to find, and they definitely weren’t someone who would casually join up with a team like theirs. However, Nie Yan had already hung up on her. The only noise she heard from the call now was the busy signal that signified that the call had ended, which ended up infuriating her to no end as she madly stamped her feet on the ground. “Hanging up on me so quickly... Now that you’ve got an expert by your side, you suddenly think you’re too good for me, is that how it is? Hmph! How infuriating!”

“So, how’d it go? Are they willing to let me join?” Tang Yao asked in an anxious tone as he fiddled with his hands.

Up until now, Tang Yao had always been someone who would join [Pick-Up Groups](#). Occasionally he would join a group and run some common instances with them. However, he had never formed a regular party or team. The teams that were able to run Level 3 or higher instances also tended to be ones with a significant influence among the player base. Not to mention, these teams usually had fixed members. In almost all cases, there was simply no chance for an ordinary player to join. This was because if a team were to accept a weak player, that player would only hold the team back. This was why teams had harsh requirements and were

particularly picky when recruiting new members. However, as long as a player met their requirements and joined their ranks, then they would easily become a part of the team. Such recruits would be called upon to join the ranks whenever the team was lacking in members.

Hence why Tang Yao waited with heated expectation when Nie Yan had hung up the call.

As a person who had also been unable to enter an elite team in the past, Nie Yan understood his feelings well. Tang Yao's eagerness and anticipation made Nie Yan reminisce about when he had first entered a team in the past; he his feelings had been about the same back then as well.

"They agreed. All you need to do is tag along with me tomorrow and you'll be fine. Your stats alone would make any team eager to have you, so relax. After all, playing an Arcane Mage requires a significant amount of skill."

"That's great!" Tan Yao excitedly exclaimed. Tomorrow was going to be his first time running a high-level instance like the Treant Forest. This was an opportunity he had been yearning for even in his dreams. "Are there any requirements to this instance?"

"For this instance, there are no specific requirements for Arcane Mages. Just make sure not to drawn any aggro and you'll be fine. By the way, Treants have a fairly low resistance against fire magic, so who knows? Maybe you'll have done the most damage by the end of tomorrow!" Nie Yan said while smiling. Meanwhile, Tang Yao was taking this matter seriously. When he recalled his first

time running an instance, he didn't fare any better...

“Did you bring any Talismans with you?”

“I've got five.”

“Let's have a look at Meteor then. Cast the spell for me before we leave here in a bit.”

“Where am I going to cast it?” The surrounding area only had one or two Rock Spiders at most. Using the skill here would be too much of a waste.

“I'll gather them up, so just get ready!” Nie Yan replied as he ran off deeper into the cave.

“Okay!” Tang Yao fished out a Talisman from his bag. He was filled with anticipation and was quite eager to find out just how powerful his new spell was.

Nie Yan continued running deeper into the cave. Whenever he encountered a Rock Spider, he would attack it once and, instead of tangling with it any further, continue on his way. After these spiders were attacked, they would chase after him. The number of spiders chasing him steadily increased until they began slowing down due to the crowding.

Nie Yan was quite nimble as he moved back and forth through the cave. The mass of twenty plus Rock Spiders following behind

him as they cried out made him resemble a train.

Tang Yao was busy tidying up his knapsack when he heard the sound of activity coming from deeper within the cave. When he walked over to take a look, he discovered a deluge of twenty plus spiders surging through the passage. They appeared as though they were going to swallow up everything in their path.

“Oh... my... God...! How did you manage to aggro so many of them!?” Tang Yao cried out in alarm as he turned around and began running for dear life.

Chapter 29 – Book Of Order

「Stop dawdling! Hurry up and cast Meteor already!」Nie Yan pestered through voice chat.

「Meteor takes ten seconds to cast! By the time I finish casting, it'll already be too late!」Tang Yao anxiously replied. He estimated he would be overrun by spiders before he could even finish casting the spell.

「I don't care, just start casting! C'mon, hurry up!」

Tang Yao clenched his teeth and unravelled the Talisman. After brandishing his staff, he began casting Meteor. Soon, large amounts of fire essence from the surrounding area began converging at his location.

As the fire essence gathered, the sheer heat from the scorching blaze caused the temperature in the surrounding air to rise.

Tang Yao watched as Nie Yan led the twenty plus Rock Spiders through the passageway and into the cave intersection. As spiders surged into the intersection like a massive wave, Nie Yan ran into to the narrow passage where Tang Yao had retreated. The passage was so narrow that only a single spider managed to squeeze itself through, but in doing so, it blocked off access to the passage for the rest of the spiders behind itself.

“Concussive Blow!” Nie Yan turned around and struck the leading spider in the head, causing it to enter a dazed state and stop

the movements of the spiders behind itself.

Eight seconds... seven seconds... six seconds... five seconds...

As time slowly ticked by, the fire essence which was steadily gathering around Tang Yao became increasingly intense.

For the most part, the spells that required a set of syllables to cast were also the ones that had a relatively large area of effect. From Nie Yan's knowledge and experience, Meteor was the only area of effect spell that Elementalists and Arcane Mages could learn at Level 0, and it was quite efficient at killing many monsters. However, even if you were to gather up a thousand Elementalists and Arcane Mages, you still might not necessarily find one that possessed Meteor.

After three seconds passed, the spider woke from its dazed state and immediately pounced towards Nie Yan. In reaction, Nie Yan raised his dagger and began skirmishing with the Rock Spider. He kept the spider firmly in place and prevented any of its attacks from reaching Tang Yao, so as to avoid interrupting the spell.

Ten seconds—whether this moment was long or short depended on one's perspective. The truth of the matter, however, was that the moment would simply be over once you counted from one to ten.

While in a trance-like state, Tang Yao raised his staff and chanted lines of strange syllables that even he didn't know the meaning of. When he finished casting, an enormous fireball fell from

above「Boom!」A deafening explosion echoed out as the fireball crashed into the group of spiders. The fireball resembled a [heavenly maiden](#) upon impact—scattering fiery blossoms in every direction. These blazing flowers didn't immediately extinguish upon landing on the ground. Instead, they continued to burn, dealing a fixed amount of damage every second to the spiders that were caught in the explosion.

「Scratch! Scratch!」The twenty plus spiders caught in the explosion were in a state of upheaval as they cried out in agony. No matter what kind of state they were in, however, they were still unable to attack Nie Yan and Tang Yao.

So, he had already calculated everything. No wonder he dared to aggro so many monsters at once.

Nie Yan and Tang Yao were only able to kill monsters like this by taking advantage of the unique topography of this intersection. Attempting to use this tactic and unleash a fireball upon a large group of enemies would've been suicidal if they were out in an open field. Normally the destruction caused by Meteor would be extremely limited in narrow spaces such as this. As it turned out, however, the intersection within the cave was quite suitable for casting the spell.

Tang Yao couldn't help but admire Nie Yan even more. For him to be able to think of a tactic like this...

A second later, another fireball rained down from above and exploded after hitting the ground.

The brilliant flames expanded into the surroundings upon impact.

Three more enormous fireballs subsequently rained from the sky. Of the spiders that had been hit by Meteor, six were directly crushed, sixteen burned to the death from the continuous area of effect burn damage, and the remaining were all dying or near death. The destructive capabilities of Meteor had been clearly displayed before their very eyes.

Tang Yao gazed blankly at the pile of Rock Spider corpses that laid before him. He had singlehandedly caused all this destruction, a realization which hard for him to conceive!

“Nie Yan... did I really do all this?” Tang Yao asked foolishly. Only after looking at the enormous amount of experience, did he finally come to accept it. Just a moment ago, he really was the caster of that formidable Meteor spell.

“What’ve you got that blank look for? Come on, let’s take care of the remaining spiders,” Nie Yan smiled and said.

“I’m out of mana.” Tang Yao gazed at his mana bar that was almost completely bereft of any colour. He still had enough to cast a few Arcane Missiles, but he wouldn’t be able to cast anything like Flame Explosion.

After hearing Tang Yao’s words, Nie Yan recalled something; Meteor was a spell that voraciously consumed mana. That fact that

Tang Yao was able to cast it was already quite impressive. Not to mention, he even had a little bit of mana left over to cast other spells!

Besides the mana consumption, Meteor also required Talismans which weren't cheap either. Therefore, if he was to continue casting this spell while grinding monsters, then Tang Yao would find his funds being quickly eaten away.

Nie Yan pounced towards one of the remaining Rock Spiders and used Vital Strike to kill it. Following this, he and Tang Yao quickly began quickly cleaning up the remaining spiders.

Soon, every single one of those twenty plus spiders had met their end and collapsed on the floor. Nie Yan walked over to the corpses and gathered up the loot which amounted to a total of three coppers. In the end, not a single piece of equipment had dropped. Nie Yan glanced at his experience bar; it had risen by another three percent after killing so many Rock Spiders.

"We've cleared out all the monsters in this area. Let's head deeper in," Nie Yan suggested. Mob grinding in such a manner could only be experienced every once in a while, as the monsters wouldn't respawn fast enough to make it a viable tactic.

"What!? Why are we going even further in?" Tang Yao asked in a surprised manner.

"There's something I must do deeper in the cave. Besides, the scenery inside this cave is quite mystical," Nie Yan replied as he

smiled mysteriously. Upon arriving inside this cave, Nie Yan had vaguely remembered something unique about it.

There was a spring at the very end of the Rock Spider Cave. Not only was the water in this spring quite deep, but it also contained many strong currents which weaved and intersected with one another underneath the surface. As for why these currents existed, it was because the spring connected to an underground lake. After passing through the lake, you would find yourself arriving at a secluded ravine where all kinds of exotic medicinal herbs grew in large abundance. However, there was something even more valuable inside this ravine. Something which countless players could only yearn for in their dreams; a torn page from the Book of Order.

In the game's lore, the Book of Order and Book of Chaos were both divine objects which had been handed down since the Era of Shared Governance (873–1235). Even after five or six hundred years had passed, the legend of these two books continued to spread. Their emergence was a mystery, as well as the origins of their author.

Order and Chaos represented the laws of the world.

Each of the two books contained six volumes, thirty-six chapters total. These books represented two distinct and opposing powers which were scattered across the world.

Legend has it that if one were to gather every page and complete the Book of Order, they would be able to revive the God of Order and gain immense power. Moreover, the owner of the Book of

Order would become the Supreme Pontiff of the Righteous Faction and control all the Holy Shrines in the continent. On the opposite side of the spectrum, if one were to complete the Book of Chaos, they would gain immense destructive power and become the Ruler of Darkness, arch-nemesis of the owner of the Book of Order.

The Book of Order and the Book of Chaos were both legendary existences.

When the first six-chapter volume emerged, a cinematic played showing the long history of the Viridian Empire and Satreen Empire.

The six chapters from the Book of Order were as follows: the Chapter of Justice, the Chapter of Honesty, the Chapter of Courage, the Chapter of Wisdom, the Chapter of Equality, and the Chapter of Freedom.

These six chapters fell in the hands of six people, each of whom were experts that possessed a seat as one of the top hundred members in the Righteous faction. The owners of the Chapter of Justice, the Chapter of Courage, and the Chapter of Wisdom were respectively the first seat, the third seat, and the sixth seat. As such, the correlation between the two caused these chapters from the Book of Order to be viewed as divine existences by the public.

It was correct that each of these chapters from the Book of Order possessed a powerful strength, but the caveat was that they could not be stored in a player's personal storage. Thus, the player would be forced to carry them on person. When the owner of a chapter was killed by another player, the chapter would always drop,

unless the player possessed all six chapters. Due to this, the fighting and killing instigated by the Book of Order was almost never ending.

The Chapter of Justice, Chapter of Courage, and Chapter of Wisdom eventually fell into the hands of the leaders of three super guilds. The owners of the remaining chapters also gained formidable power, but they had to always keep a low profile whenever they set out. They would also try to avoid using their chapter's powers in the presence of other players. Even so, Nie Yan had still witnessed the powerful might of these chapters from the Book of Order in videos before.

The holder of the Chapter of Justice was the president of Angel Corp, a Demon Hunter from the Elf race—Angyi Tianshi. He once confronted and defeated over one hundred hostile enemies by summoning sixteen Righteous Knights. One person had defeated over a hundred players. This event that later became a legend.

The holder of the Chapter of Wisdom was Holy Judgement's guild leader, a Holy Mage—Emperor Killer. He had withstood the invasion of the Undead. During which he used the Forbidden Magic Resplendent Brilliance and eliminated three hundred liches. Thus creating another legend.

The holder of the Chapter of Courage was the guild leader of the Holy Empire Guild, a Berserker—Sleepy Fox. During a guild war, he rushed deep into the enemy ranks all by himself, killing an enemy with every few steps and personally beheading over two hundred of them. He had slaughtered everything before him.

Nie Yan couldn't help but burn with excitement when he thought of this.

Chapter 30 – Search For The Chapter Of Courage

The Book of Order truly was an item of immense temptation. And now, in his new life, Nie Yan had the chance to gather all six chapters of the first volume. There was only one problem, he didn't know if he could.

Nie Yan knew the whereabouts of the six chapters in the first volume quite clearly. As for the other thirty chapters that were scattered across the world, he roughly knew most of their locations! The one he was currently searching for was the third chapter of the Book of Order—the Chapter of Courage.

“What are we going to do when we get further in?”

“Just follow me to the end of the cave. After that you can head back and continue training. The place I'm planning to go to is somewhere you're not capable of reaching,” Nie Yan replied. His destination would be somewhat difficult to reach even for a Thief like himself. Thus, there was no need to consider an Arcane Mage like Tang Yao.

“Is it dangerous?” Tang Yao curiously asked.

“Yes, very.” Nie Yan nodded and replied.

“If it's that dangerous, then why do you want to go there?” Tang Yao asked while deep in confusion.

“There’s a certain item there I want to retrieve.” Nie Yan laughed as he responded. The game had just recently come out, and players like Tang Yao wouldn’t know just how alluring a single chapter from the Book of Order was.

“I see.” Tang Yao slowly nodded his head. He still didn’t understand why Nie Yan wanted to go despite being aware of the danger. However, it seemed Nie Yan already had a plan, so he didn’t inquire any further.

After finishing their conversation, the two headed deeper into the cave. The passages were extremely narrow, which massively reduced Meteor’s effectiveness. As a result, the two had to resort to using ordinary methods to clear the way as they slowly advanced.

Rock Spiders fell one after another. Under Nie Yan’s guidance, Tang Yao felt his skills improve significantly.

“You’re making rapid progress. Keep practicing like this and you’ll find yourself becoming an expert in no time. Oh yeah, since we’ll be heading to a dungeon tomorrow, let me give you a rundown on a few of the basics. The key aspects are aggro management and positioning. The dungeon we’re running tomorrow is going to be a bit difficult, so it’s best that you take caution, especially since we’re dealing with the Treant King,” Nie Yan said while facing Tang Yao. He went on and passed down all his knowledge regarding Arcane Mages and dungeoneering to Tang Yao. From time to time, he would also explain a few of the key parts of the Treant Forest.

Tang Yao keenly listened to every word he said. Before meeting Nie Yan, he could've been considered an average player. Neither his skills nor his equipment would've been considered anything special. In the end, he could only continue lagging behind others in the lower levels. But right now he was wearing the Fire Chaser Set, which meant that his equipment was among the very best. Not only did this great success make him feel self-conscious, but it also put an immense pressure on him. In order to live up to his own expectations, Tang Yao began to work as hard as an actual expert would. In truth, Tang Yao's aptitude was pretty decent. Though it couldn't be considered at the apex, he would still be considered quite skilled. After receiving Ni Yan's pointers, however, he completely transformed. Even if he wasn't regarded as an expert, in respect to his skills, it was evident that he knew how to improve.

“What else do I have to take note of?”

“The most important stats for an Arcane Mage are Intelligence, Awareness, and Focus. Among these three, Intelligence is the primary stat and undoubtedly the most important. Now this leaves the remaining two, Awareness and Focus, which are auxiliary stats. Awareness improves your survivability when confronting enemies that are able to Stealth, whereas Focus makes it harder for your spells to be interrupted. Hence these two stats are extremely important as well. You can't improve auxiliary stats by leveling up, thus you must rely on passive skills to improve them. So if you want to keep up with others, make sure to possess the relevant passive skills. By the way, if you see any suitable skill books in the future and want to buy them but lack the money, let me know. I'll help you pay for them,” Nie Yan said.

“Money isn’t something I’m lacking, so you don’t have to do that. I’ll just need to hang around the auction house some more in the future, that’s all,” Tang Yao said as he shook his head. He took all of Nie Yan’s advice to heart.

As the pair neared the end of the cave, the faint sound of running water could be heard.

“Well, now that we’ve reached our destination you should head back. There are three Leader-class Rock Spiders up ahead, and I’m afraid you won’t be able to make it past them,” Nie Yan suggested. In his past life, he had seen a video online about how the Chapter of Courage was found. From this video, he had completely memorized the path to the chapter.

“I see... Well, you be careful then.”

Nie Yan nodded his head. “I’ll call you before heading over to the dungeon tomorrow, so go train and level for now.”

“I’ll be leaving then.” Tang Yao took out the Return Scroll, unravelled it and read it out loud. After twenty seconds, he became a streak of white light and teleported away.

Nie Yan watched as Tang Yao was spirited away, then headed further into the cave.

Originally, he had planned to wait until his level was higher before retrieving any chapters from the Book of Order. At his

current level, retrieving the Chapter of Courage would be quite troublesome. Since he was already here, however, he decided that he might as well try it out. After all, if he was successful in obtaining the Chapter of Courage, then it would certainly make it much easier for him to level in the future.

Nie Yan travelled deeper into the cave, where the secret area was located, and hid among the shadows.

After walking for three minutes, he found himself in an open space. Off in the distance, he could see three giant Leader-class Rock Spiders patrolling the area. Even further back, beyond the Rock Spiders, he could see an area entirely composed of water—roughly around two hundred square meters. The water circulated from a narrow channel which eventually led underground. This was the source of running water that he had heard from before.

Three Leader-class Rock Spiders blocked his path to the pond. They frequently moved about in the open space, only stopping in place to scratch their heads with their legs every once in awhile. Nie Yan carefully observed them. He estimated that roughly ten meters lied between him and the water's edge.

For non-Thief professions, it was absolutely impossible to pass through this area without alerting the Leader-class Rock Spiders. Other professions would have to resort to killing them if they wanted to make it through the area.

I guess there's no choice but to go in regardless!

Nie Yan understood the risky nature of such a tactic, but he had overcome situations that were several times more dangerous than this one before.

The most alluring characteristic of the Thief profession was the sheer excitement it provided. Thieves did what no other professions dared to do, and in doing so, they experienced the feeling of dancing between life and death.

Perhaps his own nature was one that welcomed risks and dangers.

What mattered most was that Nie Yan enjoyed this feeling. He strived to achieve the impossible and overcome dangerous situations one after another because it was proof of his own ability.

After some quick calculations, he estimated that two and a half meters was the closest he could get to one of the spiders without alerting it.

As long as I'm not within two and a half meters, I should be safe.

Nie Yan entered Stealth and began making his way forward.

The three Leader-class Rock Spiders continued to move about the area, their large eyes constantly reflecting images of their surroundings. Within the area, not a single thing was overlooked under their vigilant watch.

In his past life, a player once calculated the statistics of the various types of monsters. They discovered that among animal type monsters, spider types were ranked number seven when it came to Awareness. To put this into perspective, the number of animal type monsters in the game amounted to approximately six thousand. This alone proved just how high the Awareness of spiders was.

Nie Yan carefully maintained the distance between himself and the Leader-class Rock Spiders. He gradually moved towards the water's edge while simultaneously controlling his breathing.

[Using clock position](#), the locations of all three spiders were respectively three and a half meters at nine o'clock, five meters at twelve o'clock, and six meters at eleven o'clock. His body resembled a gecko as he stuck himself to the cave wall and gradually shuffled his way forward.

Every action was made with meticulous care. From the loose stones near the cave wall to the scattered gravel underneath his feet, they were all variables that he had to take into consideration.

Caution was a ship that sailed for ten thousand years; Nie Yan felt he could never be too careful. The six years of experience he had gained in his past life granted him a deep understanding of this kind of reasoning. It was something he truly learned only after experiencing countless bitter lessons. In total, he had died over three hundred outside of instances. Needless to say, the times he died while in them was even more. An expert who had never experienced death was never an expert to begin with.

If one wanted to be looked upon as an expert, then it was absolutely essential to take risks and gain experience in PvP. It was because experience could only be gained in such dangerous situations that death was unavoidable. In the eyes of an expert, players who had never experienced death or only grinded monsters to reach Level 100 were still considered beginners.

It was truly only because of his numerous experiences with death that Nie Yan became a somewhat well-known Great Thief and held the title of Shadow Dancer. The difference between Shadow Dancer and an average Thief was only a single title. At that time, however, only six other people within the entire Atlanta continent held the title of Shadow Dancer.

Chapter 31 – Assassin's Decree

As Nie Yan moved forward, he gradually came within roughly three meters of one of the nearby Leader-class Rock Spiders. The spider suddenly trembled and turned its gaze towards Nie Yan's location.

Fortunately, Nie Yan was completely immersed within the darkness of the cave. The shadows here provided him an excellent environment to conceal himself.

Even so, the Rock Spider's gaze was so intense that it actually appeared to be capable of piercing through the darkness.

The tenseness in his heart reached an extreme as he held his breath and stuck as close to the cave wall as possible.

The spider trembled as it saw a distinct silhouette gradually come into view. 「Scratch! Scratch!」 It let out a cry and rushed towards its newfound opponent.

Dammit, I've been discovered. Nie Yan's heart sank as he activated a Speed Scroll and sped towards the spring as fast he could.

In that same moment, the two other spiders also took action and attempted to flank Nie Yan.

They blocked off his path while the previous spider attempted to

ram him.

Nie Yan bent his knees to their limit and then leapt out of the way of the attacking spider.

His character's weight load was currently light, thus he had a maximum jumping distance of three meters and jump height of half a meter. In a flash, he leapt out of the Rock Spider's attack range.

「Boom!」The spider's immense body rammed into the wall. The impact fractured the wall, sending rubble falling to the ground.

Meanwhile, the other two spiders simultaneously pounced at him from the front and left flank.

However, Nie Yan's senses were sharp. He quickly went into a roll after landing, avoiding the oncoming charge of both spiders. 「Bang!」The two spiders collided with each other, and as a result, they flipped over and sprawled out on their backs.

The three Leader-class Rock Spiders had nearly blocked off all paths of escape with their massive bodies alone.

Nie Yan successfully escaped their encirclement by passing through a small gap between the three spiders, after which he continued running forward. Upon reaching the five-meter mark, he increased his pace even more as he bolted towards the spring.

One of the spiders managed to recover faster than the others and pounced towards Nie Yan. Seeing this, Nie Yan leaped into the air, and with a splash, dove head first into the spring.

The three Rock Spiders hovered around when they arrived at the water's edge. However, in the end, none of them dared to enter.

It was yet another narrow escape. As Nie Yan dove deeper, he activated the [Water Aversion Pearl's ability](#).

There was even less light underwater, which meant that his view distance was extremely limited. Meanwhile, the underlying currents posed a huge challenge as they pushed him every which way, making it more difficult to swim. At times they would even forcefully push or pull him away from his destination.

Nie Yan stabilized himself and carefully observed his surroundings. After reclaiming his bearings, he swam forth once more.

There shouldn't be any monsters here, Nie Yan thought to himself. He swam for another ten minutes before seeing gentle pillars of light shine down through the waters above him.

I remember this place! There's a treasure chest near this location! Nie Yan thought as he swam through the dark waters at the bottom of the lake. In his previous life, every inch of this area had been thoroughly searched by others. Even the hidden nooks and crannies weren't exempt from this search. It was because of this that Nie Yan knew there was someone who had found a treasure

chest in this location before.

Aside from the water far above, the surrounding region was pitch black. Therefore, Nie Yan could only rely on his sense of touch as he navigated through the area. He felt a slight pain as his feet hit the ground and he came into contact with several protruding rocks; he had reached the lakebed.

Ignoring the pain, Nie Yan continued to fumble his way through the rocks on the lakebed.

He reached his hands into the soft, delicate sand below and searched around. His hands soon came into contact with an object seemingly hidden underneath the lakebed. Immediately he began digging his way through layers upon layers of sand until a faint golden shimmer entered his eyes, causing his pupils to sharply contract.

I struck it rich! It's a gold treasure chest!

The golden treasure chest emitted a brilliant luster within the darkness of the lakebed. Every inch of its surface was covered with delicate carvings. Although these engravings seemed somewhat worn and aged, it didn't affect the overall aesthetic of the chest. On the contrary, it gave off the appeal of an artifact with historical value.

What was even more remarkable was a certain symbol on the chest that caught Nie Yan's eye: a delicate engraving of a wolf. The engraving was roughly the size of an adult's fist. When Nie Yan

looked closely, he could even make out each individual hair on this extremely detailed engraving.

Both equipment and objects within the Atlanta continent were filled with a strong historical value from all eras. Each and every sculpture, painting, handiwork, and weapon carried the historical characteristics of their respective era. Therefore, no matter what decade, century, or era, there would always be relevant research on that certain time period.

With ten full years of experience with this game, Nie Yan had a meticulous understanding of the history behind these engravings, paintings, and so on.

This particular engraving was the symbol of an infamous pirate group that roamed the Sinse Sea Region during the Era of Shared Governance (873–1235). They were an endless headache for the Republic until their legislative body finally decided to act. The Republic dispatched their most elite naval forces to exterminate the pirates. The allied navy formed by the coalition of Humans, Giants, Elves, and Beastmen forced these pirates to flee for their lives. In the end, these pirates were eventually defeated. However, rumors have it that, before the war between the pirates and the Republic broke out, the pirates hid their treasures and scattered them in various locations throughout the continent. In response, the Republic decreed that ownership of the lost treasures would go to whomever finds them. As a result, countless treasure hunting groups were formed in hopes of finding lost treasure. Indeed, many of these lost treasures ended up being found during this time period. However, many remained hidden, lost within the Atlanta continent for centuries.

This golden chest was one such relic left behind from the Era of Shared Governance. The historical value of this ancient chest alone would make historians lose their minds.

Nie Yan only knew that someone from his past life had found a chest in this area. He thought that the treasure chest would just be an ordinary one. Never did he expect that it was actually a golden treasure chest left behind from the Era of Shared Governance. Whoever found the chest must've meticulously and deliberately hid the chest's rank because of this.

Nie Yan opened the chest and reached inside. After feeling around for a bit, he grabbed onto what appeared to be a dagger. When he felt the dagger in his palm, Nie Yan couldn't suppress the fierce excitement within his heart.

He hastily took the dagger out from the chest and gazed at its properties.

Assassin's Decree (Dagger)

Properties: Unidentified

As the dagger needed to be appraised, he couldn't tell what its properties were yet. However, despite having been worn down after sitting here for centuries, the cold glint reflecting off the blade's edge showed that it was still sharp. This dagger had a unique design, vastly different from a common dagger. The handle was embroidered with various multicoloured jewels, which made it look extremely beautiful. There was also a [blood groove](#) on the flat side of the blade, which made the dagger look streamlined and

sleek. The tip was not unlike a barb with the blade curving inwards. This dagger looked like it could easily cut through flesh.

Assassin's Decree? Nie Yan tried to search his mind for any information related to this dagger, but nothing surfaced. He had never come across this dagger before, and thus he was unable to guess its properties. Despite this, he was still able to discern from the design of that dagger alone that it was at least a Gold-tier piece of equipment.

Nie Yan understood just how significant owning a Gold-tier piece of equipment this early in the game's existence would be. He would have many opportunities in the future which wouldn't have presented themselves had he not obtained this dagger.

Knowing this, Nie Yan was filled with endless excitement as he stored the dagger into his knapsack. Even if he failed to retrieve the Chapter of Courage this time, this dagger alone would've made the trip worthwhile.

According to how the game was designed, it was highly unlikely that two chests of the same quality would appear in the same area. The chances for such a situation to occur were slim to none. Thus Nie Yan didn't bother searching the lakebed anymore and instead began swimming up towards the surface where rays of light gently shone down into the water. As he neared the surface, the light became increasingly intense.「Splash!」When Nie Yan's head broke through the surface of the water, he found himself in an extremely small spring.

He surveyed his surroundings and discovered a beautiful valley.

The clear spring he found himself in flowed down the valley gulch and into a flourishing forest below. An abundance of grass grew freely in the rest of the valley, resembling a thick green carpet which covered everything aside from the forest itself. Various kinds of wild flowers were littered across the area. These flowers gave off a delicate fragrance which wafted throughout the region.

Surrounding the valley were steep green mountains that acted as a natural barrier from the outside world. These mountains were home to a diverse range of vegetation, which meant this area was most likely sealed off from the rest of the world.

A short while later, Nie Yan was now walking through the deeper parts of the forest below. The dense foliage blocked off most of the sunlight from above, however, some light still managed to pass through the tender green leaves and shine down upon the earth below. It was because of this, the forest was not dark, but instead tinted a shade of viridian which gave off a mysterious yet warming sensation.

As Nie Yan walked through the forest, the surroundings made it seem as though he had entered a completely different world.

Chapter 32 – The Third Chapter Of The Book Of Order

Nie Yan swept his gaze over every nook and cranny in the forest. When he spotted a certain shrub at the base of the mountain, he was incapable of looking away.

This particular shrub reached up to his knees and had many branches. It's appearance was not unlike a jade sculpture—pure, translucent, and radiating with vibrant colours. Tucked away within the shrub's leaves was a single scarlet red fruit that resembled a cherry—tender and glistening.

This is a Red Urnberry! I didn't think a plant like this could appear in such a low-level area!

Nie Yan's memories were still quite clear; during the latter years of his past life, the selling price of a single Red Urnberry reached up to several hundred gold. Moreover, each and every Red Urnberry held different properties.

Nie Yan walked towards the steep mountain wall and carefully harvested the Red Urnberry from the shrub. Fortunately he had already learned the gatherer skill, otherwise he would've had no chance retrieving this fruit—an event which would've been truly unfortunate.

Red Urnberry (Rare Fruit)

Description: The player who eats this fruit will gain +2 Willpower permanently.

Restriction: Each player may only consume this fruit up to three times. Further consumption will not yield any additional benefits.

Considering the Red Urnberry's inherent rarity, and the fact that it could also permanently increase a player's stats, it was no wonder this fruit could sell for upwards of several hundred gold.

Nie Yan contemplated for a while before finally deciding to eat the fruit. After all, this was a rare opportunity. Besides, this fruit was meant to be eaten; only a fool would actually sell it.

An additional two Willpower was quite decent. Willpower was a stat that reduced the effectiveness of debuffs (such as sickness, poison, curses, resistance debuffs, etc) on a player. It didn't matter if it was PvP or PvE, Willpower was a stat that would always be useful. After all, the number of mobs and classes that could cast debuffs on a player were more than just a few.

Nie Yan put the fruit into his mouth. It melted almost instantaneously and became warm current that flowed directly to his stomach.

He took a quick glance at his Willpower stat. It had gone from zero to two.

Having two willpower at such a low level was rather useful. After

eating the Red Urnberry, he didn't dally any further and headed deeper into the forest.

After walking down a path hidden in the grass for roughly five minutes, he finally entered the deeper part of the forest. Here the trees were more lush and exuberant, but the lighting was much dimmer due to the light having to penetrate through much more vegetation to reach the ground below.

The forest floor was covered in a layer of dead leaves that stretched as far as the eye could see.

Within the dark forest, a single bright ray of light could be seen shining through the dense foliage. The absence of any other lights only served to make it all the more prominent and clear.

At the centre of the ray of light was a meter high cylindrical column that seemed to have been carved out of stone. Placed atop this column was a thick book which seemed to have been eroded by the elements. Its worn state seemed to be a testament to the book's long and distant history.

This book was, according to Nie Yan's memories, aptly named "Annal of the Era of Shared Governance." Its contents detailed all of the historical events that occurred during the Era of Shared Governance.

It was within this thick history book that the Chapter of Courage was hidden.

Nie Yan walked up to the column and extended his right hand towards the cover of the book. The moment his fingers made contact, the book opened up by itself and began rapidly flipping through its pages.

Suddenly, a narration began playing.

「Within this secret forest, you've discovered a thick book that chronicles the history of an ancient era. Upon placing your hand on the book, you suddenly feel a mysterious force enter your body. "What's this?" you inquire to yourself while brimming with curiosity. Shortly after, the pages in the book begin turning by themselves, revealing mysterious silver leafed characters. From these characters, you learn this "Annals of the Era of Shared Governance" was written by a combination of three languages: the Kasate Giant language, Ancient Universal language, and Draconic language. You record this newfound knowledge in your head.」

「System: You've learned the language of the Kasate Giants.」

「System: You've learned the language of the Dragons.」

「System: You've learned the ancient language of the common people.」

「System: You've received the "Annals of the Era of Shared Governance."」

The Atlanta continent contained over three hundred languages.

Before, Nie Yan had only learned the current common language, which was the language of the Humans. Yet suddenly, he had learned three new languages. He quickly glanced over his information page and realised it had a new section titled “Annals of the Era of Shared Governance.” Within this section was a description of every notable event that had occurred during that era.

This sort of data was invaluable. In the future, it could help Nie Yan accomplish many tasks and identify various items.

This “Annals of the Era of Shared Governance” will save me a lot of time and trouble when completing quests related to that era, Nie Yan couldn’t help but think to himself.

「“Eh?” Looking closely at the book, you are surprised to discover a separate piece of paper tucked away between the pages of the book. Numerous rows of mysterious, dark golden characters dotted this page. As you look over the lines of gibberish, you slowly realise that these characters belong to the language of the Kasate Giants and spell out “Chapter of Courage”.」

I’ve finally found it! Nie Yan pleasantly thought to himself as he glanced at the chapter’s properties.

Chapter of Courage: The third chapter of the first volume of the Book of Order, an incomplete piece of the legendary book.

Description: Whoever shall possess this chapter will receive the inheritance of the God of Light. Your mission is to spread the glory

of light.

Properties: Receive two additional stat points and one skill point every five levels. Focus +15, Willpower +15, Resilience +16, Jump +15, Reflex+15, Speed +16.

Transcendent Insight: Gain the ability to see through your enemies. Allows you to view enemy character information. Also grants the ability to appraise items.

Passive: Awareness +10

Adjudicator of God: When activated, become immune to all magic, gain 500 health, and summon an advanced life-saving shield that absorbs sixty percent of all incoming damage for five minutes. (This skill cannot be used in instances)

Cooldown: 10 days (1/10)

User Restriction: Can only be bound by a member of the Righteous faction who protects the light.

Note: Item effects are applied immediately upon entering the player's inventory.

Nie Yan stared out blankly as his hands began to tremble lightly. He had seen the properties of this chapter on the internet in his past life before, but now, as he held the chapter in his hands, he experienced an entirely different feeling. He reckoned this

Adjudicator of God was the very skill the guild leader of Holy Empire, Sleepy Fox, had used to slaughter his way through two hundred players in his past life. Not to mention the skill even made the player immune to every single type of magic for five minutes. What kind of overpowered ability was this? What was even more disgusting was the fact that Sleepy Fox already had top-tier equipment in the first place. If you added immunity to all magic, five hundred health, and a shield that absorbed sixty percent of all damage, then his strength would undoubtedly become excessive beyond reason. To meet him on the battlefield would simply be meeting a god of death. However, the cooldown period of the skill was still quite high. After all, it would take ten days before the skill could be activated again, which was why most players wouldn't rashly use the skill unless they were at a critical juncture.

And that was just the Adjudicator of God skill. The chapter's other properties were quite powerful as well, especially the one that allowed a player to gain an additional two stat points and one skill point every five levels. Nie Yan was practically bursting with happiness. From his knowledge, the only professions that had a bonus that came close to this were Shamans, Paladins, and Dark Knights, who also gained two additional stat points every five levels. Due to their profession's characteristics, however, they had to evenly distribute their stats between strength and intellect, because those professions would practically be useless if only focused on a single stat. However, a Thief was different. On top of the five stat points and one skill point he would gain every five levels from Level 0 to 30, he would now also gain two additional stat points and one skill point every five levels thanks to the Chapter of Courage. Nie Yan understood what this meant.

If you included the other stat bonuses and properties of the chapter, Nie Yan had effectively leapt up to become one of the top

experts, if not the strongest player in the game. This chapter from the Book of Order clearly lived up to its name as a legendary existence.

After placing the Chapter of Courage into his knapsack, Nie Yan glanced at his stat page and found that several of his stats had risen by a large amount.

When Adjudicator of God came off cooldown, he would become unequalled in terms of combat strength.

However, from now on, he would have to take extra caution whenever he was killing mobs or fighting players. This was because the Chapter of Courage would immediately drop from his body if he died. The only way to prevent this was to find the other five chapters and complete the first volume of the Book of Order.

Despite having finally retrieved the Chapter of Courage, Nie Yan didn't relax or loosen his guard at all. After storing the chapter in his knapsack, he took out a Return Scroll and began channelling it.

「System: Unable to activate Return Scroll from this location.」

Chapter 33 – The Boss Emerges: Guardian Of Order

Alarms rang out in Nie Yan's mind. He understood well what this announcement signified: he was currently in a sealed region. How could the game allow him to get the Chapter of Courage so easily?

It was reasonable to assume that the chapter would have a guardian protecting it, which was a boss known as the Guardian of Order. However, up until now, why had it still not made an appearance?

In the past, Nie Yan had merely skimmed through the video regarding the chapter. There was one thing, however, that remained deeply engraved in his mind: the imposing figure of the Guardian of Order.

As Nie Yan thought about this, the ground beneath his feet began to violently tremble and crack. It was as though something below was attempting to force its way up. Nie Yan glanced at the path he took to get here, but found it had been obstructed by falling boulders.

Shit... I have to make a run for it! He looked around but there wasn't even a single exit anywhere in sight. With no other options left, he began heading towards the mountain.

Upon arrival, he found a slope that didn't seem too steep and began nimbly climbing his way up.

Many trees grew atop the mountain slope, giving him plenty of handholds.

While climbing, Nie Yan suddenly recalled something, Oh right, the Ring of Woven Silk! Up until now, he still hadn't found an opportunity to appraise the ring. However now, with Transcendent Insight, appraising it would be a cinch. He took the ring out from his knapsack and appraised it.

Ring of Woven Silk (Bronze): Unique Accessory

Level Requirement: Level 0

Properties: Release a thread of silk that can adhere to certain surfaces. The thread can extend up to five meters in length and has a tensile strength of two hundred pounds. (Cooldown: 20 seconds)

Weight: 1 lb

User Restriction: Can be equipped by all factions.

After equipping the Ring of Woven Silk, he wanted to appraise Assassin's Decree as well. At that very moment, however, a powerful gust of heat was expelled from the valley below as the ground shattered into countless pieces. Like a volcanic eruption, countless boulders and rock fragments were sent flying into the air. Many of the trees in the valley had been uprooted and were strewn across the area, while others had spontaneously combusted—a scene of utter and absolute destruction.

At the very centre of the valley, a horrifying crater of lava emerged and swallowed up everything within its reach

A dormant giant, awoken from its slumber, pulled itself up from deep beneath the ground. It was the servant of God and possessed the power to bestow divine judgement.

I don't have much time... The suddenness of it all prevented Nie Yan from appraising the dagger, as he had to divert his attention back to scaling the mountain. The burst of heat had caught him off guard and he nearly slipped and fell back down to the valley below.

Standing atop one of the many trees growing horizontally on the mountainside, Nie Yan glanced upwards, looking for the next handhold. After spotting one about two meters away, he leapt high up into the air and grabbed onto a protruding rock, then clambered up. With this, he had made some more progress scaling the mountain.

Meanwhile, back at the valley, a giant head emerged from the cracks in the earth, followed by immense arms, a torso, and legs.

From head to toe, the giant was roughly sixty meters in height. Two wings covered in pitch black feathers sprouted from its back. In its hand was a thirty-meter-long crystal scepter. When it emerged from the earth, its entire body ignited with a blazing red aura, causing a whirlwind of scorching heat to rise and form at the centre of the valley.



With Transcendent Insight, Nie Yan could see the giant's stats.

Guardian of Order (Low-level Intelligence): Level 100

Health: 200,000/200,000

The giant spoke with a bellowing voice that stretched far into the valley. Though whatever he was saying sounded like gibberish, it was actually the languages of the Dragons. His words roughly translated to “Light and darkness alternate in cycles. I am the protector of God’s will and guard his Order. If there is a sinful person who desires to purloin the chapter from the Book of Order, then they shall receive divine judgement!”

Legends say that the Guardians were birthed from the merging of giant and dragon. Viewed as freaks of nature, they were banished into the deep wilderness where they eventually received God’s baptism. Entrusted with a task from God, they protect the various

chapters scattered across the world.

The Guardian's gaze swept across its surroundings, finally coming to rest on a figure that had almost climbed to the mountain's peak. With a single beat of its massive wings, the giant's immense body rapidly rose up into the air.

The giant bellowed, "Black Flame Tempest!"

As if answering the giant's call, a scorching black cloud of flame emerged out of thin air and began rapidly congealing into a sphere. Afterwards, the ball of black flame shot towards Nie Yan. 「BOOM!」 The Black Flame Tempest exploded on the mountainside, scattering pitch black fireballs in every direction and setting the entire area ablaze.

Not far from Levin Hills, in a small forest town by the name of Link, the earth violently shook and trembled. Players who had gathered at the town were left frightened and anxious due to the sudden commotion.

"What's going on!?"

"Look over there, where the mountains are!"

The entirety of the mountain's peak had been engulfed in a cloud of black flame. And within those black flames emerged the immense silhouette of a figure hovering in the air. It was as though an apostle of destruction had arrived from the gates of hell itself.

Soon, a disaster warning was issued in Link.

「Warning: A monster of the Dragon race has emerged south of Link. We advise all nearby players to depart the area immediately!」

After a few brief moments, a flash of brilliant light was emitted from the transport point in Link. A group of fully armed NPC soldiers wearing bright silver armour had arrived in town. On the chest of each of these soldiers was a medal engraved with the insignia of the Holy Crusaders. The soldiers rapidly assembled in the public square, their numbers reaching an excess of several hundred.

Within the Viridian Empire, there existed two elite armies which were considered to be the empire's most powerful fighting forces. The first belonged to the Imperial Church and were known as the Holy Crusaders. This army was composed of over five hundred thousand troops and their Commander-in-chief was the Holy Mage, Jebiah the Great. They were tasked with the duty of protecting the entire empire. The second army was the Guardian Legion of the Temple of Light, known as the Temple Guards. They numbered less, at around fifty thousand strong. Unlike the Holy Crusaders, however, their sole duty was to safeguard the Temple of Light and uphold the religion of the entire empire.

These several hundred soldiers who had arrived to guard the town belonged to the Holy Crusaders.

“No wonder, it was a monster from the Dragon race!”

The players vigorously chatted amongst themselves while gazing at the Guardian of Order who was hovering in the sky.

The Dragon race: an existence that was both powerful and distant to mankind. During the Dark Era (-2678-230), dragons had reigned supreme and established a mighty empire on the continent, which enslaved all other races. Eventually, their rule was toppled by the combined alliance of Giants, Humans, [Dwarves](#), Elves, and Beastmen. To prevent facing retaliation from the dragons in the future, the alliance enacted a mass genocide of all dragons throughout the continent. Thus, the former glory of the Dragon race was no more; however, they didn't simply fade from existence. There were still many dragons scattered across the continent, hidden away in their secluded abodes.

The Viridian Empire had classified the Guardian of Order as a member of the Dragon race. Although they were technically wrong, at least in regards to exterior appearances, there were only minute differences between the two.

With the appearance of the NPCs, the minds of players began working. A monster of the Dragon race had emerged, along with a large number of NPC soldiers. In such a scenario, the two parties were most certainly going to clash, which left the players wondering what sort of profits they could fish out from this spectacle.

Soon the information became widespread, and with it, guilds began appearing one after another through the transport point at Link . The three most prominent guilds were Splendid Temple,

Dark Massacre, and Holy Empire. Each of which had sent anywhere from a thousand to over several thousand players.

The equipment the dragon might drop truly represented an irresistible enticement for these guilds.

In just a short period of time, Link had suddenly become armed to the teeth. Even the ballistae in the guard towers were being loaded and prepped.

A few moments earlier...

Nie Yan lifted his head and gazed the immense figure hovering in the sky. The pair of wings on its back were large enough to blot out the entire sun. When the Guardian displayed its might by casting Black Flame Tempest, clouds of black flame emerged and covered the sky, before congealing into a dense fireball. As if it were a meteor, the dense ball of black flame crashed towards Nie Yan, engulfing everything in its path.

The large black fireball exploded upon colliding with the mountain, sending several smaller fireballs scattered across the surroundings. On impact, they smashed boulders to rubble, created deep craters everywhere, and charred the earth black.

Even when faced with such a situation, Nie Yan still didn't panic. Instead, by relying on his experience, eyesight, and judgement, he remained cool-headed and found a safe place to hide after calculating the fireball's trajectory. Fortunately, the fireballs weren't concentrated in a single area, but the explosive power of

each individual fireball was still quite a terrifying sight to behold.

Shit... he's coming down. Nie Yan tilted his head and gazed upward. He saw the Guardian of Order's immense body descending towards his general location like a hawk swooping down to catch its prey. This creature, which looked like it had come from the deepest layers of hell, definitely wasn't something he was currently capable of contending with.

Compared to the Guardian, Nie Yan was such a frail existence that even so much as a slight touch from the Guardian of Order could end his life.

Nie Yan didn't spare a single second as he began rapidly descending the mountain. He made it about half-way before stopping at a steep cliff. As he peered downwards, he noticed it was roughly an eighty-to ninety-meter drop. Taking a quick glance behind, he saw the Guardian fast approaching his location. Without a second thought, he made a leap of faith and jumped off the cliff.

「BOOM!」The Guardian of Order descended onto the cliff where Nie Yan had just been standing moments ago. The impact of his landing shattered the surrounding rocks and boulders.

As Nie Yan fell from the mountain, his speed rapidly increased. He could feel the vegetation growing on the cliffside sweeping past his ear. Occasionally, one or two branches would briefly break his fall, only to immediately snap after bearing the full weight of his impact.

-7, -9, -5...

Each collision caused damage values to appear above his head one after another.

Chapter 34 – The Holy Crusaders

Nie Yan rapidly approached the earth, his body soon to crash into the ground. With his left arm extended, he activated the ability from the Ring of Woven Silk. A web line shot out and adhered to the cliff face between the vegetation, slowly decelerating his descent. The line was tough and resilient and resembled a rubber band as it gradually stretched itself to the limit.

The tension on the web line continuously increased.

The force of Nie Yan's fall surpassed the silk line's tensile strength and the line gave out with a snap, taking many of the branches and rubble from the cliff face along with it.

Despite snapping, the web line still managed to significantly slow down his falling speed.

-56

「Thud!」Nie Yan fell onto the ground. Fortunately, the fall damage wasn't too high and was within the limits of what his health could handle.

In normal circumstances, if a player didn't have an item such as the Ring of Woven Silk to cushion the fall, they would most certainly die!

Having climbed and fallen over the other side of the mountain, the distance from his current location to Link wasn't too far off. With safety being his number one priority, Nie Yan entered stealth and activated a Basic Haste Scroll. From a half-withered bush at the base of the mountain, he made a sprint towards Link. The large crowds in the town should offer a little protection.

Having failed its attack, the Guardian of Order beat its wings and hovered in the air. Nie Yan had already escaped the valley by entering Stealth and disappeared without a trace.

After the fall, Nie Yan and the Guardian were more than one hundred meters apart. Even if the level disparity between them was high, it still couldn't make up for the distance. Hence, even if the Guardian had a clear view of Nie Yan, it would still be unable to see through his Stealth.

With regards to how Stealth detection range was calculated, it depended on level disparity, the Awareness stat, and observation ability. With some rough estimations, Nie Yan was ensured as long as he stood at least one hundred meters from the Guardian, he would be safe from its detection. Even if it was a Level 100 Elite-class, its level, Awareness, and observational abilities couldn't make up for such a large gap in distance.

Nie Yan turned his head to look back. At this point, the Guardian of Order still hadn't left the area. Rather, it was heading over in his direction to investigate.

Without delay, Nie Yan held his breath and hid behind a large boulder.

The Guardian beat its wings and flew over. As it hovered in the sky, it investigated the area below it for any signs of movements, but didn't manage to discover Nie Yan.

The hunter and the hunted: the Guardian of Order was like the eagle in the sky, while Nie Yan was like the prey on the ground.

There was still roughly a kilometer between him and Link. Under the attentive gaze of the Guardian, there was no way for him to safely travel such a large distance.

There's still another method. I can use the Return Scroll!

It was possible to use the Return Scroll in this location; however, it would take a full twenty seconds to activate. Moreover, when channeling, the scroll would emit a bright light which would definitely attract the Guardian of Order's attention.

With its flying speed, the Guardian wouldn't need more than ten second to fly over to Nie Yan and kill him after discovering his location.

As the Guardian gradually descended from the air, the distance between it and Nie Yan became increasingly near.

This'll be troublesome... Nie Yan anxiously thought. If the Guardian were to enter a range of less than a hundred meters, it was possible for his hiding location to be detected. With every step,

danger was slowly approaching.

Since I can't hide and avoid it, I might as well try fleeing for my life. Only... I'm not sure if I can make the half mile run.

Just as the Guardian prepared to descend onto the ground... 「Whoosh! Whoosh! Whoosh!」Three arrows swiftly came flying over, all shot from afar. Each arrow separately aimed for its head, throat, and heart. The Guardian avoided them by flying to the side, causing all three arrows to miss their target.

In the distance, atop a large withered old tree, a tall NPC archer wearing silver plated armour drew his bow. 「Whoosh! Whoosh! Whoosh!」Another three arrows were fired into the air.

The Guardian of Order let out a hiss. Seemingly resentful of the provocation of these low-level beings, it pounced towards the NPC.

Several soldiers approached the archer in the tree. “Commander Nisode, the defensive perimeter has been built. We’re awaiting further instructions,” reported the several fully equipped soldiers.

“It’s approaching. Withdraw to Link! This foolish dragon will experience the divine judgement of the Holy Crusaders!” Commander Nisode shot a glance at the Guardian of Order speeding towards them in the air. Afterwards, he returned the bow to his back, leapt from the tree, and gracefully landed on the ground.

Under Commander Nicole's provocations, the Guardian of Order flew over Nie Yan's head and headed straight for Link.

「System: Level 1 Disaster Warning! Invasion of a dragon!」

The Guardian bellowed in the dragon language, “Blazing Meteor!”

The Guardian brandished its scepter. An enormous meteor formed out of blazing flames fell from the sky and streaked towards Link.

Flames were set ablaze in the sky. The meteor, fifty to sixty meters in size, would most likely engulf the surrounding twenty-five hundred square meters.

“Activate the basic defensive formation!” Commander Nisode climbed up to the tallest tower in Link and issued the order to those below him.

Afterwards, a blue barrier began forming and protected the entire town within it.

「BOOM!」The meteor exploded over the barrier while fire blossoms scattered in all directions. The barrier trembled violently due to the impact. Even all the players within the town could feel the barrier trembling as the remnant heat and fire elements assaulted their senses.

“ATTACK!” Commander Nisode issued out another order from the command tower. Immediately, every ballista within the town aimed at the Guardian of Order and fired.「Whoosh! Whoosh! Whoosh!」Countless bolts flew through the air in a densely packed salvo.

Simultaneously, several thousand Archer and Mage players also fired a volley of attacks.

Meanwhile, the Guardian of Order unceasingly fired off its own magic attacks. Under its barrage of attacks, the barrier began showing signs of breaking as cracks appeared everywhere.「BANG!」A loud explosion echoed throughout the town as the barrier was shattered into pieces. With the barrier shattered, the Guardian rushed into the town and descended into the town. With a single step, the Guardian crushed a nearby building, sending smashed tiles, bricks, and other building materials flying everywhere.

The appearance of the Guardian wreaked havoc among the players in the town.

“Holy shit! It’s a Level 100 Elite monster! Fighters, don’t rush forward!”

“Mages! Where are the fucking Mages!? All of you, fire your spells!”

“Shi—fuck, dammit!! All of our attacks are misses! The level gap is too high!”

Panic and confusion spread through the players and the town was in a state of chaos and upheaval. Over ten heavily armoured Holy Crusaders rushed forward to engage the Guardian. Surrounding the Guardian, the soldiers began their assault, but their countless attacks fell short and were the equivalent of raindrops as they landed on the guardian's body.

The Guardian was glowing red as a flaming aura surged from its scales. It was a terrifying existence which brought about destruction. With every swing of its scepter, a Holy Crusader would be smashed and sent flying. Buildings were crushed or knocked down, and the ground was scorched and charred, leaving a path of ruin wherever it passed.

“By the glory of the Holy Crusaders, my name is Commander Nisode and I will pass divine judgement upon this sinister dragon! Tyrant Impaling Arrow!” With these three words spoken, Commander Nisode placed his hand on the bowstring. He grunted heavily as he pulled back until it reached its maximum draw weight.「BOOM!」He released the bowstring. The arrow fiercely spiralled forward and carried a biting cold rotating energy along with it.「Bang!」The arrow briefly encountered some resistance when it met with the Guardian's scales only to immediately pierce into and bore its way through the Guardian's body.

-87829

An unfeasibly high damage value had appeared above the Guardian's head.

The acute damage made the Guardian of Order release an indignant roar containing its wrath and fury. It raised the immense scepter in its grasp high into the air. The surrounding fire elements along with the smoldering remnants of its previous spells began to gather around and took the shape of an immense rotating pillar of flame.

The fighting in Link became increasingly intense. As for the origin of such this disaster, Nie Yan, he was inwardly rejoicing in his mind. Fortunately, the soldiers from Link led the Guardian of Order away; otherwise, I would have undoubtedly met my end.

Nie Yan was lingering around the outskirts of the town. Under the numerous attacks of the town's soldiers, the Guardian of Order would soon be unable to resist any longer. He was curious what sort of equipment such a high level monster like the Guardian would drop. As he thought of this, Nie Yan's mind was full of anticipation. He drew slightly closer to the Guardian at roughly sixty meters away and hid under the cover of a ruined building.

Since there was still a bit of time, Nie Yan took out Assassin's Decree from his knapsack and decided to appraise it with Transcendent Insight.

Assassin's Decree (Gold): Secondary Weapon

Level Requirement: 5

Properties: Attack 26–29, Strength +16, Accuracy +12

Attack Speed: 2.5

Weight: 3 lb

User Restriction: Can be equipped by all factions.

It was a secondary weapon and was truly worthy of being Gold-tier—Level 5 with an attack of nearly thirty. He would be able to equip it once he learned Dual Wielding and reached Level 5. His attack would then rise tremendously when he possessed such a powerful weapon. After glancing at its properties, Nie Yan put Assassin's Decree back into his knapsack.

As for whether the Guardian of Order would drop any equipment, Nie Yan didn't have high hopes. After all, the Guardian of Order was merely a protector and its existence was simply to safeguard the chapters from the Book of Order. These types of beings frequently dropped no equipment. However, there were naturally always exceptions to these cases.

Chapter 35 – Trip

The chapters from the Book of Order weren't going to be left in incompetent hands, thus existences such as the Guardians of Order emerged.

The game designers put in such a powerful creature to guard the chapter, yet only gave it low-level intelligence. Therefore, the Guardian of Order only acted by instinct and its aggro system was the same as any other ordinary monster.

Therefore, Commander Nisode's arrival had saved Nie Yan's life at the most critical juncture.

There's actually quite a few people here... Nie Yan swept his gaze over the surrounding environment and noticed many other players eyeing the current battle like tigers watching their prey. The moment the Guardian of Order died, these hundred or so players would all simultaneously take action in an attempt to pilfer whatever equipment that dropped!

There're so many people here. Even if the equipment does drop, I definitely won't be able to snatch it. I already got the Chapter of Courage... I should be satisfied with what I have, Nie Yan inwardly contemplated.

He was an easily satisfied person. Thus he never held high hopes when situations occurred where it was certain he would not obtain anything.

Nie Yan focused his gaze after peering past several obstacles and caught sight of a few acquaintances.

Xingzhi Huihuang (Splendid Star): a twenty-something-year-old man with a squarish jawline. He was the guild leader of Splendid Temple. Even though he couldn't be regarded as handsome, he was still passable in terms of looks. His clean-shaven face gave off a bright and refreshing kind of look. In Nie Yan's past life, he had friendly interactions with Nie Yan. Having helped Nie Yan on several occasions, he had a reckless personality but valued loyalty and friendship. In turn, Nie Yan had also accompanied him and his friends during several guild expeditions.

Lima Hengdao (Swift Slash): a sloppy looking man and the thirty-six-year-old guild leader of Dark Massacre. According to rumours, he was part of the criminal underworld and had quite a few underlings under his command. His personality was nothing great and on rare occasions would buttheads with Xingzhi Huihuang. As such, Nie Yan himself didn't have too great of an impression on this person.

Sleepy Fox: a player who was roughly thirty years old. Nie Yan wasn't too familiar with him nor did they have any sort of relationship. However, as the guild leader of Holy Empire, he was a somewhat well-known name. It was rumoured his prestige within the guild was fairly high—he was capable of leading Holy Empire into becoming one of the top ten largest guilds. This achievement alone was proof of his strength.

He was also the holder of the Chapter of Courage in Nie Yan's previous life!

Xingzhi Huihuang and his group were lying in wait among the ruined buildings in the west. Lima Hengdao and his group were located in the southwest. Both sides were watching like tigers awaiting their prey, ready to act any moment. On the other hand, Sleepy Fox was located in the east. The corner of his mouth curved into a ridiculing smile as he gazed at the two sides ready to duke it out. He planned to swoop in when both sides were exhausted.

As he watched such a scene unfold, Nie Yan couldn't help thinking... what if Sleepy Fox were to know he had taken the Chapter of Courage which was supposed to belong to him? What kind of reaction would Sleepy Fox have? Would he grab all his men and unrelentingly chase him down?

“Lima Hengdao, with our Splendid Temple members here, your Dark Massacre guild should just step off to the side. Don't be so unwilling to accept it. I was the first to reach Level 5 before you. I was also the first to clear the Treant Forest and Blackflame Forest before you. No matter in real life, or in the game, I've always been ahead of you!” Xingzhi Huihuang bluntly proclaimed as he stared at Lima Hengdao in an unyielding manner.

Lima Hengdao's face turned ashen. Xingzhi Huihuang's words had infuriated him quite a bit. He sneered, “So what if your Splendid Temple guild cleared the Blackflame Forest? Your clear rate was only sixty-eight percent—it's nothing to brag about. Your guild's Honour is only higher than ours by two hundred points. Given some time, we'd easily catch up.”

“We're two hundred points ahead of you right now, but who

knows? Maybe by tomorrow, we'll be ahead by a thousand, then the day after, two thousand. Trying to overtake us? Try again your next life!"

Guild reputation was a representation of a guild's strength; otherwise, why else would they care about such a tiny gap in Honour points?

"Bastard! You're looking to die!"

"What's so terrific about Xinzhi Huihuang and his guild? Come on, let's kill them!" A member of Dark Massacre passionately shouted from within the group.

"Brat! If you have the guts, then come up here!"

Over at Splendid Temple's side, their members were itching to go as well. However, neither side made a move and only continued cursing at each other. The main goal of their trip was still to secure the equipment the Guardian of Order might drop.

This equipment was the target of all three guild leaders.

Meanwhile, the Holy Crusaders vehemently resisted the Guardian of Order, not yielding by even a single inch. The archers at the rear continued to fire a rain of arrows with every single one concentrated solely on the Guardian's body.

The Guardian of Order thundered furiously and cast its magic.

The deep and archaic dragon language echoed above Link with spells one after another pouring down like a torrent of raindrops.

“The Guardian of Order doesn’t have much health left! Quick, snatch the equipment!”

No one knew which person shouted those words, but immediately, a deluge of players pounced towards the Guardian of Order.

After Commander Nisode let out an explosive shout, a single arrow shot out from his bow and pierced the Guardian of Order’s shoulder, causing blood to gush out everywhere. The Guardian issued a mournful cry before transforming into white light and vanishing in the air. A single gold piece of armour fell from where it had been.

“It’s the equipment! Get it!” Xingzhi Huihuang coldly shouted.

“Kill whoever manages to snatch the equipment!” The guild leader of Holy Empire, Sleepy Fox, also ordered from the guild chat.

Three to four hundred players pounced from all directions and charged towards the armour that had fallen from the Guardian of Order. Every guild within the game could be seen included in the crowd—an especially chaotic scene to behold.

He never expected the Guardian of Order would actually drop a

piece of equipment. Moreover, it appeared the equipment dropped was Gold-tier as well. Seeing this, Nie Yan also charged into the fray. He was already here, so why not give it a try anyway?

A Berserker from Holy Empire had taken the lead by activating Charge which increased his speed by a significant amount. Soon, it appeared as if he were about to snatch the equipment at any moment. However, ten spells immediately came flying over, bombarding his body simultaneously. After being hit by so many spells at once, his body transformed into a beam of white light and vanished.

“Fuck!” Sleepy Fox, seeing the piece of equipment just within his grasp fly away once more, cursed loudly. “Keep fighting!”

The three major guilds still didn't near the dropped equipment. Instead, they began fighting and fired barrages of spells at one another. Seven or so players approached the dropped equipment and were immediately met with an explosion of spells that turned them into ashes.

Nie Yan was roughly twenty meters from the dropped equipment with a member from Dark Massacre, a Fighter, obstructing the path ahead. The Fighter noticed Nie Yan and came forward to intercept him.

With his body lowered, Nie Yan evaded and weaved his body past the Fighter's attack.

The Fighter's body shot into empty space. He stared out blankly

before turning his head. By that time, Nie Yan had already run far away.

“CHARGE!” As a Berserker, Sleepy Fox took the lead and rushed forward.

Immediately, a dozen spells came bombarding towards him. As he was about to be hit, Sleepy Fox dodge rolled at the last moment. Of the dozen spells, only three managed to land on his body.

The equipment belongs to me! Sleepy Fox felt ecstatic as he bent down to pick up the equipment on the ground.

“Don’t be so quick to get happy!” Lima Hengdao coldly shouted.

“Ensnare!” Lima Hengdao brandished his staff, chanted several syllables, and cast Ensnare. Sleepy Fox’s body immediately became rigid as he was rooted in place.

While Lima Hengdao was a Shadow Priest, Ensnare was still a rarely seen spell that could cause a player’s body to become rigid. At Beginner level, it could root a player in place for three seconds.

Dammit! Sleepy Fox cursed in his mind. He was unable to move any part of his body.

At the same moment, Lima Hengdao and Xingzhi Huihuang both simultaneously pounced towards the armour and drew increasingly near.

Five meters, three meters...

In terms of speed, Lima Hengdao would definitely be able to snatch the armour before Xingzhi Huihuang.

Nie Yan had entered stealth and followed Lima Hengdao and Xingzhi Huihuang closely from behind. However, the two were still faster than him by a pace which meant he definitely wouldn't be able to snatch it away. Since he couldn't get the equipment himself, why not send it to a friend?

Nie Yan swept his left leg out!

Tripping was a basic movement in Conviction. In melee combat, a player could trip their opponent and cause them to stumble. The success rate depended on the person's Strength stat and the opponent's body weight.

Fortunately, Nie Yan's left leg managed to stop right in front of Lima Hengdao's foot, causing him to immediately lose his balance and fall once his leg was hooked.

「Thud!」Lima Hengdao fell onto the ground while Xingzhi Huihuang extended his right hand and grabbed the armour before stuffing it into his bag.

Only then did they realize there had been a Thief following them closely from behind.

After retrieving the equipment, Xingzhi Huihuang gave Nie Yan a grateful glance and said, “Thank you.” He discovered he didn’t recognize this Thief’s face at all. He wasn’t a part of their guild and Xingzhi Huihuang had never met him before. However regardless, this Thief had still helped him at this moment.

Chapter 36 – Sleepy Fox

With the Gold-tier armour possessing an owner, Xingzhi Huihuang (Splendid Star) hastily returned to his guild ranks.

Sleepy Fox felt extremely vexed. If Lima Hengdao (Swift Slash) hadn't abruptly rooted him in place, that Gold-tier armour would have belonged to him!

Some felt elated and others felt upset, but no one could surpass the joy Xingzhi Huihuang currently felt because he had become the biggest winner this time around. He glanced over and observed Nie Yan. Earlier, the timing of this Thief's trip—albeit a basic movement—was simply perfect. No matter the timing or position, he was not even a single iota off. The perfection of his timing and positioning definitely wasn't by coincidence; it was intentional!

Moreover, Nie Yan was closer to him at that time. Reasonably enough, if Nie Yan had attempted to trip him instead, he'd have no way to evade. However, Nie Yan still purposefully chose Lima Hengdao. If it weren't for this, the Gold-tier armour would have never fallen into his hands!

“Ah... I didn't manage to get anything.” Nie Yan shrugged his shoulders and spoke in an indifferent manner, then turned around to leave.

“You want to leave after all that!? Don't think you're going to be let off that easily!” Lima Hengdao coldly snorted. If it weren't for Nie Yan, the equipment would have definitely belonged to him!

In the same moment he spoke, several dozen Dark Massacre members in the area coldly shouted and began converging around Nie Yan, blocking his exit in a semi-circle.

“What...? You people want to detain me here?” Nie Yan’s replied with an unperturbed smile. However, his mind was still deeply scheming. It would be somewhat difficult if he wanted to break out of Lima Hengdao’s encirclement with his power alone. Moreover, if Lima Hengdao wanted to come to blows, Nie Yan felt he wasn’t a good person to provoke either.

“He’s my friend. Lima Hengdao, if you want to cause him problems, first ask yourself if our Splendid Temple members will approve or not!” Xingzhi Huihuang interrupted, seemingly determined to oppose Lima Hengdao as he stood shoulder to shoulder with Nie Yan. While behind him, the Splendid Temple members—after hearing their leader voice out his opinion—stepped up as well.

It was only because of him that Nie Yan ended up provoking Lima Hengdao. So naturally, he wouldn’t stay himself from the matter at hand.

“Xingzhi Huihuang, are you certain you want to contend against me!?” Lima Hengdao coldly threatened.

“Correct, our Splendid Temple isn’t afraid of your Dark Massacre guild. Brothers, tell me if I’m correct?” Xingzhi Huihuang turned back and asked his guild members.

“CORRECT!” The people from Splendid Temple roared in unison.

“If you Dark Massacre people have the guts, then come up and fight! This old man will happily accompany you!”

“You ball-less sons of bitches! Don’t tell me you’re suddenly afraid!?”

The people from Splendid Temple began shouting obscenities with both sides entering a shouting match afterwards. With swords drawn and bows bent, either side began forming their respective ranks. The atmosphere smelled of fresh gunpower. A fight was going to break out at any moment. Splendid Temple had over seven hundred players remaining while Dark Massacre had nearly a thousand. From the look of things, each side had taken heavy losses from the Guardian of Order. Thus, in terms of numbers, Splendid Temple was at a disadvantage.

Nie Yan glanced at Xingzhi Huihuang by his side. This guy was the exact same in Nie Yan’s past life—he valued loyalty quite a bit. It appeared Nie Yan didn’t make a mistake in helping Xingzhi Huihuang today. However, if they were going to face off against Dark Massacre, Nie Yan had to bear the brunt. It seemed the upcoming battle was going to be considerably dangerous and fierce. If he died, the loss in level and experience were of lesser importance. What was most important was the Chapter of Courage—an item he absolutely didn’t want being dropped!

“It appears I have no business being here.” Sleepy Fox laughed,

bringing his companions off to the side. If a large spectacle were about to begin then why not have it play out a little quicker? Either way, the matter was unrelated to him, so he could not get involved with it. As for the Gold-tier armour, there was nothing he could do since he wasn't able to get his hands on it.

Among the Holy Empire members, a certain Paladin wearing bright silver armour walked to the front and leaned over beside Sleepy Fox's ear. "Boss, that Thief is the expert I mentioned before!" the Paladin said as he pointed his finger towards Nie Yan. Astonishingly, he was the Paladin Nie Yan had crossed paths with before, Flying Stone.

"Eh?" Sleepy Fox exclaimed in surprise. He then observed Nie Yan from the distance. It appeared this Nie Yan was still quite young; however, his skills were fairly good. From his actions earlier, he resembled a leopard as he went to trip Lima Hengdao. "He's only Level 3... Don't tell me his team was so strong they were able to clear the Fallen Shaman Camp at only this level?"

"Boss, what are we gonna do?" Stone asked. After all, they were still somewhat acquainted with Nie Yan. Moreover, at this moment, he sincerely believed that they should help Nie Yan.

"Let me think it over." Sleepy Fox pondered for a long time. For Nie Yan, was it worth it to make an enemy out of Dark Massacre solely for his sake?

After a brief moment, he had his answer.

Since the beginning, Sleepy Fox had never attached importance to a small fry guild such as Dark Massacre.

“Hey, Brother Nie Yan! In a few days, our Holy Empire guild is planning to run the [Agmota Muddy Wetlands](#). I wonder if you’re interested in joining?” Sleepy Fox loudly called out.

Sleepy Fox’s abrupt interruption immediately caught everyone’s attention. Even Lima Hengdao and Xingzhi Huihuang simultaneously cast their gaze over in Sleepy Fox’s direction.

Splendid Temple and Dark Massacre were currently in a deadlock. Thus, the intentions of the Holy Empire guild were especially important to take note of, because whoever Holy Empire decided to help would directly influence the outcome of the battle.

How does Sleepy Fox recognise me? Nie Yan shot a glance at Sleepy Fox and saw Stone standing by his side. Ah... So, it was like this.

“The Agmoto Muddy Swamplands, huh? Sure, I can think it over. However, if you want me to clear a dungeon with you, I have a few conditions first. I get the first pick on all Thief equipment and any item I have a use for,” Nie Yan replied.

At this moment every player—be they Dark Massacre, Splendid Temple, or even Holy Empire—focused their gaze on Nie Yan. They discovered he was no more than an average player who hadn’t even joined a guild yet. However, why would the guild leader of Holy Empire, Sleepy Fox, invite him on a dungeon run?

Even more outrageous was the fact Nie Yan didn't immediately accept. He even made excessive demands. Getting first priority on all Thief equipment, who the hell does he think he is!?

Holy Empire was a famous guild among the player base. With fifty-six thousand Honour points, it was an existence which far overshadowed the likes of Splendid Temple and Dark Massacre.

In the eyes of players, guild prestige was the index for whether a guild was strong and powerful. Every cleared instance as well as completing quests for the first time guaranteed some Honour points. Naturally, the Honour points received increased with instance difficulty. Therefore, the higher the guild prestige, the more likely it was to find strong experts within the top rankings of the guild. Another benefit was the ability to attract elite players to the guild.

At any rate, the guild leader of Holy Empire, Sleepy Fox, could be regarded as a celebrity.

Moreover, this celebrity surprisingly invited an obscure no-name player like Nie Yan to run a dungeon with him. This was truly a strange and unforeseen turn of events.

Many players looked at Nie Yan with differing expressions. However, what they all shared in common was the extreme jealousy and envy in their heart. After all, most players would be extremely honoured and elated to have been personally invited to a dungeon run by the guild leader of Holy Empire himself.

A lone Tempest Thief moved closer to Sleepy Fox's side and berated, "Leader, that guy's way too outrageous! The moment he opened his mouth he requested first-pick on all Thief drops. Who the hell does he think he is!?" He then shot a cold glance at Nie Yan. If Nie Yan were to enter their team, wouldn't that mean all the Thief equipment would go to him? What would there be left remaining for himself then?

"Like I said before. Nie Yan is an expert! Trying to invite him definitely won't be easy," Stone instantly refuted back.

After hearing Nie Yan's demands, Sleepy Fox laughed. "He's truly got quite an ego. Previously, I still didn't believe he was an expert. However, this time, around, I could be considered more or less convinced. Since he dared to be so arrogant with his requests, it must mean he has a little skill."

Stone nodded his head and took a glance at the Tempest Thief to his side.

Since the guild leader voiced his opinion, that Thief could only turn his head off to the side dejectedly.

"Brother Nie Yan, if you're willing to agree, then naturally all Thief drops will go to you first," Sleepy Fox straightforwardly replied.

Sleepy Fox unexpectedly agreed to Nie Yan's excessive demands? Everyone present stared with widened eyes. This was too

unbelievable. The expression of all the surrounding players turned strange as they gazed at Nie Yan. Just who was this person if he was capable of making Sleepy Fox concede so much just in order to befriend him?

Chapter 37 – Joke Becomes A Reality

Since Sleepy Fox was capable of leading the Holy Empire to a position of reverence, it meant he had little boldness in him. Nie Yan pondered for a brief moment. If he wanted to be fully equipped with top-tier gear, it wouldn't be possible unless he ran dungeons. The equipment that could be bought in stores and the auction house were mostly second-rate gear because most guilds were unlikely to sell the equipment if it was a rare drop. The only method for obtaining the best gear was by running dungeons with a team. Although Holy Empire's elite team wasn't as strong as the one in his previous life, they were still a decent alternative.

"If that's the case, send me a message when you're ready to run the dungeon," Nie Yan replied.

Lima Hengdao (Swift Slash) was also listening to the conversation going on between Nie Yan and Sleepy Fox. At this moment, Dark Massacre had been put in an awkward situation. If he wanted to deal with Nie Yan, not only would he have to go up against Splendid Glory, he'd have to face Holy Empire as well. How could his own forces possibly stand up against two entire guilds?

"Lima Hengdao, spare me some face. Let's forget about the matters that occurred today, alright? Brother Nie Yan is a friend of mine," Sleepy Fox said with a smile. His smiling expression contained a trace of danger. If Lima Hengdao wasn't willing to look past his grievances, Sleepy Fox's Holy Empire certainly wouldn't be as easy to deal with as Splendid Temple.

"Since Guild Leader Sleepy Fox has spoken, I'll let this matter

pass.” Lima Hengdao swept his gaze at Nie Yan and Xingzhi Huihuang (Splendid Star) and coldly snorted. He then turned to face his party. “We’re leaving.”

Lima Hengdao brought the rest of Dark Massacre with him and departed.

After his departure, Sleepy Fox began walking over to Nie Yan’s side.

Seeing Sleepy Fox walking over, Xingzhi Huihuang looked beside him and said, “Wow, I never thought you were friends with the guild leader of Holy Empire. As for today’s matters, thank you.”

Xingzhu Huihuang made conjectures but no definite conclusions regarding Nie Yan’s identity. However, since Sleepy Fox was treating him so courteously, he must have some kind of background.

“We just happened to meet by chance, nothing too close,” Nie Yan replied with a faint smile.

“Eh... Is that so?” Xingzhi Huihuang examined Nie Yan’s facial expression and determined it was unlikely he was lying. However, if that were the truth, the manner in which Sleepy Fox treated Nie Yan really was worth thinking over.

“Brother Xinzhi Huihuang, your harvests today were rather decent,” Sleepy Fox interrupted. An amiable smile lay on his face

and his tone was serene. He did not mention the conflict that had occurred moments ago, as if what they were fighting for was merely a single piece of equipment. This was expected of the leader of Holy Empire, Sleepy Fox did indeed have a fairly broad heart.

“Ah... Brother Fox, please don't bring that up. If you want this Gold-tier armour, there's no harm in giving it to you as a gift,” Xingzhi Huihuang replied dejectedly.

“Eh? Why is that? Don't tell me the equipment's properties are bad?”

“It's not that... The properties aren't bad. You'll understand when you see it for yourself.”

Afterwards, Xingzhi Huihuang shared the properties of the Gold-tier armour he had just recently obtained.

Unyielding Armour of Courage (Gold)

Level Requirement: 100

Properties: Defense 585–621, Thorns Aura +5, Strength Blessing +12, Counter +15

Weight: 38 lb

User Restriction: Warrior; can be equipped by all factions.

Sleepy Foxed sucked in a breath of air. “It is a Gold-tier armour! Ah, what a pity...” Sleepy Fox sighed after exclaiming in admiration. This armour was strong but it was currently useless as it could only be equipped at Level 100. Who the hell knew how long

that would take to reach!

“Indeed, it’s a pity. Moreover, the properties on it are rather decent too. I went through such hardships to get this armour only to discover I have to wait until Level 100 to equip it. Even if I threw it up in my shop, I doubt many people would want it.” Xingzhi Huihuang sighed.

It was no wonder Xingzhi Huihuang felt so dejected.

“No matter, just chuck it in your storage and treat it as a treasure,” Sleepy Fox comforted with a smile.

“Haha. Indeed, it is a treasure!” Xingzhi Huihuang laughed loudly. He then stored the armour back into his bag.

“Expert, we meet again! Next time, we’ll able to run a dungeon together!” The Paladin Flying Stone walked over and greeted with an excited laugh.

“Mhmm...” Nie Yan replied with a slight nod.

When everyone from Holy Empire suddenly began referring to Nie Yan as “Expert,” Xingzhi Huihuang stared at him with an astonished expression. Just how high was his degree of skill?

“I still have business to attend to, so I’ll be leaving first. I won’t be troubling you two guild leaders any longer.” Nie Yan excused himself and said his farewells. He still had many matters left

unattended.

The current highest leveled player within the game was already Level 6. Moreover, the experts of top guilds like Sleepy Fox and his group were all Level 5. Although Nie Yan did indeed obtain quite a few good pieces of equipment, this time, around, the fact remained that he still had to slowly catch up bit by bit. Hence, he didn't want too much of his time being squandered.

“Brother Nie Yan, don't forget your promise!” Sleepy Fox, seeing Nie Yan wanted to depart, quickly called out and reminded him of their promise.

“I'll be fine as long as you give me three hours' prior notice,” Nie Yan replied.

“I'll add you as a friend then,” Sleepy Fox suggested and sent Nie Yan a friend request.

“Me as well,” Xingzhi Huihuang interrupted and sent Nie Yan a friend request at the same time. He also sent Sleepy Fox one as well. Holy Empire was much stronger than Splendid Empire. Thus, adding Sleepy Fox as a friend undoubtedly gained him a powerful ally as well.

「System: You've added Sleepy Fox as a friend.」

「System: You've added Xingzhi Huihuang as a friend.」

In his previous life, Nie Yan and Xingzhi Huihuang had only been mere acquaintances. He had sold many pieces of equipment to Xingzhi Huihuang with methods such as real life credit exchanges . However, whenever Nie Yan sold to Xingzhi Huihuang, he would always buy them ten percent above the market price, which aided Nie Yan out of several desperate situations. Thus, their relationship in Nie Yan's past life carrying over in this one could also be considered a type of fate.

After leaving Sleepy Fox and Xingzhi Huihuang, Nie Yan headed in the direction of Link's transport point.

Due to the devastation and havoc caused by the Guardian of Order running amok, Link had become a ruin of its former self—barely any buildings remained standing.

I can finally finish Physician Blevins' quest. However, it's still best if I purchase more Bat Teeth first, Nie Yan pondered. Quite a bit of time had already passed, so the players should've picked up quite a few Bat Teeth by now. As for Physician Blevins, since he had already issued the quest, he wouldn't leave before the deadline ended.

Nie Yan arrived at Mordor and hung up his sign: "One Copper for One Stack of Bat Teeth!" Immediately, the area bustled with activity and a large crowd of players gathered around his shop. From Nie Yan's perspective, these players were akin to an oncoming wave of money.

"Brother, you're here to purchase Bat Teeth again?"

“I have a stack here with me.

“I have a stack as well!”

The business was even livelier than it had been earlier in the morning.

Nie Yan's storage began rapidly accumulating with Bat Teeth. Only after an hour did business slow down. However, by that time, his personal storage had no less than three thousand stacks of Bat Teeth piled up. He also made trips to two other towns and purchased two thousand more stacks. Afterwards, he exchanged all five thousand stacks of Bat Teeth with Blacksmith Kade for a net profit of fifty silvers.

In addition to his remaining capital, he had a total of sixty-one silvers in inventory.

The average beginner player regarded this amount as an unimaginably large sum of money.

I've purchased quite a few Bat Teeth today. I'll wait until tomorrow and continue buying more, Nie Yan thought. He glanced at the time—June 7th. It appeared the day after tomorrow would be the announcement for the opening of a new dungeon, Sosil Valley. When the time came, he guessed many large guilds would be lining up to explore the area. Suddenly, Nie Yan recalled a certain something and smacked his head. How did I manage to forget this too!?

The final boss in the Level 3 dungeon, Sosil Valley, named Bousso the Roaming Werewolf was quite difficult to deal with. Moreover, the claws of the werewolves in the dungeon were all coated with a highly toxic poison. Perhaps, not few would horrendously fall victim to this dungeon. For example, in his previous life, he and his friends had been met with such a fate when they first made their attempts. Before the dungeon had opened, one of the known cures for the poison, Black Phenol, only sold for two coppers each and the formula to create it only sold for sixty coppers each. However, once the dungeon opened, on that day alone the price of Black Phenol shot up by five hundred percent and the formula's price shot up by a thousand. One of his friends joked around about the matter saying if he could go back in time, he would have stocked up on Black Phenol and Black Phenol Recipes with the intent of striking it rich once the dungeon opened.

At that time the matter had only been a joke, but who could have known Nie Yan would actually go back in time? This joke had ended up becoming a reality!

Chapter 38 – Boots Of Swiftess (Gold)

Nie Yan's train of thought suddenly diverged. It wasn't only Sosil Valley. Similar situations had occurred during the future openings of other dungeons. For example, with the opening of Golden City, the prices of equipment with Dark Resistance +5 or higher increased by tenfold; when Specter Gorge opened, the prices of equipment with Focus +7 or higher increased by twentyfold. This sort of situation occurred frequently with the opening of a new dungeon, so by no means was a case like Sosil Valley isolated.

After going back in time there were opportunities to strike it rich everywhere, yet he had still worried about not making enough money?

Nie Yan arrived at the auction house and opened their catalog page. Within their alchemy section, he found a large amount of Black Phenol. Altogether there were a little over a hundred and eighty bottles for sale with each bottle selling for around two coppers. The current amount of uses this Black Phenol had were quite limited, which made them hard to sell and was the reason their price could not rise any higher. Nie Yan bought all one hundred and eighty bottles without the slightest hesitation. He then checked the subsection for alchemy formulas—fifty-six Black Phenol Formulas in total, each selling for twenty or so coppers. He bought all of these in one go as well

At this point in time, Black Phenol was classified as a useless material. However, very soon, players would quickly learn of its value. The moment Sosil Valley opened, they would return to purchase Black Phenol only discover its price had already sharply increased to a nearly unimaginable level.

From then on, the market price of Black Phenol would stabilize at no less than ten coppers per bottle. Moreover, it could be frequently sold for higher.

When he finished purchasing what he needed from the auction house, Nie Yan began walking over to the personal storage. He planned to leave these items there until the day Sosil Valley opened. After all, it was too much trouble keeping them on his body.

Five alchemist players, each wearing a silver moon shaped badge, strolled past Nie Yan. They paid him no heed as they passed by, seemingly enveloped in their own banter.

“How strange... I wanted to buy a Black Phenol alchemy formula to level up my Alchemy, but who would have they were sold out. I had no choice but to buy a Silver Phenol Formula instead.”

“How is that possible? How many people if any ever buy that kind of item? When I checked in the morning, there were still fifty or sixty formulas for sale in the auction house.”

“Why would I lie to you? If you don’t believe me, go check for yourself. Not only the formula, even the item itself was all sold out!”

“Indeed, that’s strange...”

When Nie Yan listened to the conversation of these alchemists, the corner of his mouth couldn't help curving into a slight smile as these several players walked by.

When he arrived, Nie Yan deposited all of the Black Phenol Formulas and bottles of Black Phenol inside his storage. Afterward, he purchased a few more consumables: Haste Scrolls, Strength Scrolls, Underwater Breathing Pills, etc... He then arrived at Tellak town through the transport point and ran in the direction of Lake Rando.

There was still half an hour to the servers shutting down. So if possible, he'd like to hand in the quest before going offline.

Nie Yan used a Basic Haste Scroll and increased his speed by twenty percent. After thirty seconds the buff would fade away. However, he would immediately use another one to maintain his high travel speed after the Basic Haste Scroll's cooldown disappeared.

If word of Nie Yan's actions were to spread, he would certainly receive a flurry of angry complaints from other players. The average player, even when encountering danger, wouldn't be willing to rashly use a luxury item such as the Basic Haste Scroll. However, Nie Yan was simply using this scroll for no other reason than to slightly increase his speed so he could save a bit of time.

The Fishmen Village appeared at the edge of Nie Yan's vision. However, as he neared, he discovered the village had been turned into ruins. There were the corpses of Fishmen littered everywhere and would only respawn after the servers went offline. This was

the work of Victorious Return. However, all of their members had already departed. Under the glow of the sunset, the broken down huts of the Fishmen Village appeared especially bleak.

After clearing the Fishmen Village, at the very least, Victorious Return received ten pieces of Silver-tier equipment. If their luck was good, they may have even obtained one or two pieces of Gold-tier equipment. Additionally, they also obtained a large quantity of Fishscale Leather was used to craft equipment.

Turns out the members from Victorious Return move pretty quickly... Nie Yan thought. He felt a slight sense of crisis developing in his heart. Though his enemies were great in number, the most important point was that even if he was developing on his own, their growth wouldn't halt either!

After passing the Fishmen Village, Nie Yan dived head-first into Lake Rando and quickly swam towards Physician Blevins' little island.

Around ten minutes later, Center Island was finally within his vision. When he gazed at the island, he could make out the lonesome figure of an elderly man off in the distance. He appeared to be fishing from the shoreline underneath the waning light of the setting sun.

I wonder what sort of reward I'll obtain this time around... When Nie Yan thought of this, he couldn't help but increase his pace.

“Youngster, you've returned. How are you doing with the task I

entrusted you?” Physician Blevins asked, after seeing Nie Yan come ashore.

“Senior, I’ve gathered all of the materials you requested. These are the ninety Fine Silks Senior tasked to me to retrieve. I hope they are enough to aid in Senior’s task.” Nie Yan then handed the Fine Silks to Physician Blevins.

“At last, I’ve collected enough Fine Silk. It seems I can return to the Hilton Stronghold by the next day. The brave warriors at the stronghold will remember your kindness. Generous and benevolent adventurer, may the Holy Radiance bless you. The darkness will finally disappear and light will spread throughout the continent,” Physician Blevins replied in a hopeful tone as he stored the Fine Silks into his satchel.

「System: Your Influence in Hilton Stronghold has increased by 11.」

Nie Yan glanced at the system announcement that had just appeared. In certain regions, the higher a player’s influence, the easier it would become for that player to receive specific quests. Moreover, the player would also receive preferable treatment and discounts when purchasing items. When can I head to the Hilton Stronghold for a visit? I can’t let these eleven Influence points go to waste! Nie Yan couldn’t help but think.

“May God bless the brave warriors stationed at the stronghold,” Nie Yan acted in a sincere manner and replied with a prayer as well. This type of tone and speech when speaking to an NPC absolutely made a difference.

“These things can be regarded as a token of my heartfelt appreciation. Generous and benevolent adventurer, I wish you a pleasant journey.”

「System: You have received 16,523 experience points.」

「System: You have received Boots of Swiftness (Gold).」

Nie Yan thought he would receive three pieces of equipment as a reward for the quest, one for every twenty percent. He never expected in reality, he would only receive one. Maybe this was one of those quests that gave a better reward the more you handed in at once. Unexpectedly, the reward, this time, was a pair of Gold-tier boots!

He examined the properties for this pair of boots.

Boots of Swiftness (Gold)

Level Requirement: 5

Properties: Defense 19–21, Resilience +11, Movement Speed +12

Weight 2 lb

User Restriction: Thief, can be equipped by all factions.

It adds eleven points of resilience and twelve points in movement speed! What a good item! Every point of resilience increased health by two and slightly increased defense. Eleven resilience was an increase in twenty-two health and eleven defense. Moreover, the

boots also had the property of movement speed +12. It was simply one of the best pieces of equipment you could get at the early levels.

I finally have a good pair of boots to use at Level 5.

Nie Yan stored the Boots of Swiftiness into his bag. Afterward, he expressed his gratitude to Physician Blevins. When he checked his experience bar, it was already at ninety-seven percent. He would level up very soon!

There were still ten minutes or so before the servers shut down. He swam over to the nearby Water Spiders in the area and began killing. After ten minutes of nonstop training and ten spiders later, he had only risen to ninety-eight percent. It looks like I won't be able to level up today. I'll randomly kill a few mobs first thing tomorrow and I should be able to level up by then.

Ah... whatever, I'll just get off now, Nie Yan thought. Since there was less than a minute remaining, it wasn't enough time for him to kill another monster. Thus, he logged off and lifted the gaming helmet off his head.

Chapter 39 – Frail, Sickly, And Poor

When Nie Yan exited the game, he immediately began an intense and rhythmic exercise regimen consisting of resistance training, squats, boxing, martial arts, and reflex training. He completed each set of exercises ten times, only stopping once every five minutes to rest and replenish his stamina with nutritional supplements.

Besides punching force, strong kicking power was also an important requirement in martial arts as well.

Nie Yan was prepared to do weighted squats. His two legs immediately felt strained when he attached thirty kilograms of weight to his body.

He placed both hands behind his head and began lowering his body from a standing position. He stopped when his knees bent at a near ninety degree angle, and then he began returning to his original position. One repetition... Two repetitions... After three repetitions not much time had passed, yet his back had already begun to sweat. When he completed twenty repetitions, he felt his entire body was on the verge of collapse. However, after drinking some nutrition tonic and resting for two minutes, he continued onward with his second set of squats.

Within his moment of rest, his stamina progressively recovered while his exhaustion was swept away.

After going back in time, my current body's recovery ability is

rather decent. With such a good aptitude, I definitely can't let it go to waste, Nie Yan couldn't help but think.

When his body began gradually adapting to the additional weights, he added another five kilograms. He then picked up his machine dynamics textbook and began studying while doing squats.

His body was pushed to its physical limits, yet he clenched his teeth and continued to persevere.

“The combined application of the lever arm and torque inside the machine... The calculation of current strength... The problems I had so much trouble with in the past were actually this easy.” Nie Yan began writing and drawing on his notebook. His writing speed was fairly quick. In but a brief moment, he had solved a highly difficult problem regarding current strength.

His body was exhausted at this moment. However, his mind was exceptionally active.

Even if he returned to the past, he had still experienced a lifetime's worth of bitterness and solitude. Therefore, Nie Yan knew it was not easy to come by his current happy life. He wanted everyone in his life to be happy. He wanted himself to become stronger. No matter if it was in game or real life, economical ability or personal fighting accomplishments, he had to be strong in all those areas. Only then could he have the power to protect all that he held dear.

Cao Xu, if you're unwilling to let my family go in this life as well, I'll definitely kill you! Nie Yan's expression flickered with murderous intent. He then added another five-kilogram weight and quickened his pace.

One, two, three, four, five...

The sound of his heavy breathing echoed out of the room.

The affection for his loved ones and the hatred for his enemies, these were two emotions were at extremes. However, either one of them could cause a person to burst with endless potential and ability. And, at this moment, both were propelling him to move forward.

"Ninety-seven... ninety-eight... ninety-nine..." Nie Yan had reached his limit long ago. He was persevering solely through willpower alone. The weights were pushing down on his body; he was unable to breathe. However, at that moment, he explosively roared, "One hundred!"

Nie Yan put every single muscle fibre within his being to use. Bearing the forty kilogram weights which weighed down on his body, he shakily pushed himself upright. In the instant he straightened out his body, he felt he had drained every last ounce of strength he had. An intense fatigue rushed forth as he collapsed on the floor.

"Hah... I reached my limit." Nie Yan lay on his back while repeatedly gasping for breath, every muscle aching with pain.

Even under this extreme fatigue, he could still feel the exhaustion gradually lightening in the same way as before.

Nie Yan crawled back up after resting on the floor for five minutes. He felt his fatigue had significantly lessened as he stretched his four limbs.

Perhaps, I should go out and test my strength, Nie Yan thought.

This was an era where everyone engaged in some form of physical tempering. Nearly every citizen practiced taekwondo, kickboxing, or some other form of martial arts. There were martial arts facilities littered everywhere along any street. Usually, these martial arts facilities had several experts hired as instructors to teach patrons. Fitness equipments and exercise machines were incorporated into these facilities much like a regular gym. These facilities charged a fixed fee every hour for patrons who wished to use the equipment and machines. The working hours for the average person were quite brief, so most people liked to spend their spare time exercising at these facilities. People who didn't exercise were looked down upon by the rest of society. Even when it came to picking up girls, men who knew martial arts would have a much easier time. Furthermore, there were frequent appearances of beautiful women with fantastic figures at these martial arts facilities.

Nie Yan had been through it all in his past life. He had gone mad from grief, insane from hopelessness, and debaucherous as well. He became even more of a silkpants when his father gained success. He had loitered around at all types of locations, and he

especially never forgot or neglected those facilities where all the beautiful women frequented. Occasionally, he would even play around all through the night. At that time, he truly had the type of disgusting personality people could not bear. Xie Yao was the only thing that acted as a restraint in his mind and prevented him from crossing the line. Only when his father had suffered under Cao Xu's attacks did he finally return to being studious and well behaved. However, by then it was already too late.

When he was well-off in his previous life, he had never gone to the martial arts facilities to actually train, but to chase girls instead. This time around, his mentality and experiences were widely different.

Nie Yan walked over to the nearest martial arts facility in his area, Lin Family Martial Arts Facility. It was a facility run by the father of one of his classmates. However, this classmate wasn't someone he could particularly stand, so he hoped he wouldn't encounter her when he entered the facility.

The Lin Family Martial Arts Facility couldn't be counted as particularly large, but it was still of a decent size. The interior decorations weren't bad either, and the various kinds of equipment and exercise machines were all available. In other words, within the local area, it could still be considered well-known.

Nie Yan stepped into the facility. As he lowered his head and looked at the reception counter, a familiar figure entered his eyes. Dammit! Why is she at the desk today?

The one receiving customers at the desk was Lin Jia. Truthfully, he and Lin Jia could be said to have a slight connection. They both lived near each other and were classmates in elementary school, middle school and high school. Her looks weren't bad either—she was one of the prettiest girls in middle school. Though, when they reached high school, her looks became sorely outclassed compared to the other girls he met. In Nie Yan's eyes, there was no need for comparison when it came to her and Xie Yao. It was debatable if you tried to pass the one off as good looking, while the other was undoubtedly a beauty that moved many hearts. Despite this, during middle school, he did indeed have a crush on this girl. He had even written her a love letter, which was promptly rejected when it was received. Some time after the event, she began proclaiming publicly that Nie Yan was secretly in love with her, which left him with basically no face. This event left him with a shadow in his heart that he wasn't able to break free from until he transferred schools to the city.

As he gradually grew older, he came to understand that Lin Jia was a very vain type of person. How could someone like her ever be together with an impoverished person like him? Later on, after Nie Yan turned from a poor boy into a silkpants, she and Nie Yan crossed paths again during a gathering at his place one night. That night Nie Yan threw three hundred thousand dollars worth of banknotes at her. During the whole ordeal she remained surprisingly tactful. After taking the money, she left and never tried to tangle with or get close to Nie Yan again.

As he recalled this annoying memory, Nie Yan became unwilling to think of it any further.

Nie Yan turned to leave. However, after pausing for a moment,

he had a change of heart. Mentally, he was already a twenty-something-year-old man. There was no need for him to be bothered because of this little girl. In any case, he was going to transfer schools in the future. By then, he would have no relation to her at all, why would he have to hide?

“Boss, give me a card for two hours.” Nie Yan placed fifty dollars on the desk counter.

The voice could still be regarded as somewhat familiar to her. She lifted her head to look at the person who spoke and discovered it was Nie Yan. Waving him away, she revealed a disdainful expression and said, “You came here to find me, right? Well, I don’t have any free time, so leave.” In her heart, there was no difference between Nie Yan and a loudly buzzing housefly.

Lin Jia was indeed a little pretty. She wore a silk dress with neckline that exposed a large area of white skin. Her cheeks were smooth and clean. Her eyebrows were drawn in a curve with eyeliner. Paired with her bright eyes, it did indeed make her seem somewhat coquettish.

However, before Nie Yan’s current gaze, Lin Jia was nothing more than a little girl who knew how to dress up slightly, that’s all. During middle school, his eyes must have truly been covered with shit to have been infatuated with a girl like her. Later on, during several student gatherings, he had found girls more beautiful than her everywhere. At that time he realized, she was only considered more beautiful because she was slightly better than her peers at dressing up, and putting on makeup. This was the sole reason she was able to stay popular during their time together in middle

school and high school.

“I want a two-hour card to use the gym.” Nie Yan indifferently glanced at Lin Jia.

“Nie Yan, I already told you. Stop coming around to pester me. With a scrawny matchstick appearance like yours, you still want to come here and exercise?” Lin Jia replied with a sneer on her face. She then waved her hand and threw a card at Nie Yan.

This girl has been watching too many television dramas... Nie Yan was too lazy to bother with this girl. He picked up the exercise card and headed farther into the facility.

Lin Jia still wanted to say a few more words, but Nie Yan had already turned around. Thus, what was left facing her was only his back. The few words she had left to say were swallowed back down her throat. However, she then followed with a sneer and said, “Your family owes five, six hundred thousand dollars in debt, making you a penniless bum. Your group of relatives drop by every day demanding repayment, and your parents are nowhere to be found. You still have the whim to come here and exercise?”

When her harsh words reached Nie Yan’s ears, his heart rose with a slight anger. If this were the previous him, perhaps he would have already rushed up in a rage. However now, as twenty-eight-year-old man, it just wasn’t worth his time arguing with a snobbish brat who had barely reached adulthood.

Lin Jia gazed at the receding figure of Nie Yan’s back. She stared

absentmindedly as if she were looking at an illusion. From when she last recalled, Nie Yan didn't seem this muscular or robust.

“Peh, how is that possible? This guy is a famous matchstick known for always being frail and sickly. Even if he didn't move, he'd get sick and ask for a leave of absence.” The tone of her voice contained a trace of mockery.

“Lin Jia, who was that person just now?” asked a young man who went over to Lin Jia's side. His hair was dyed blonde and he appeared to be in his early twenties.

“That was one of my classmates. One of our 'honour students' who ranked third in literature!” Lin Jia replied. Her expression immediately revealed a charming smile when she saw this young man coming over.

Chapter 40 – Setting New Records

“Tsk, so what if he’s an honour student? In my eyes, he’s no more than fart. With a tiny body like that, I bet I could send him flying with a single punch. Hey, babe... What say you and I head over to the hotel tonight and have some fun?” The young man named Bao Wei groped Lin Jia’s perky buttocks with his perverted hand. A moment later, the hand began reaching deeper under her skirt.

“Hehe. You know this is my father’s place, right? If he catches you, he might even beat you to death.” Lin Jia rejected his advances and pushed his hand aside. Nevertheless, her actions and tone were quite gentle as she giggled while reprimanding him.

Nie Yan inwardly sneered when he caught a glance of what was occurring back at the desk counter. Turning his back, he proceeded to the machines to test his strength.

The first machine was to test his pulling strength. Nie Yan sat back and placed both hands on the grips of the machine. “Nhgh...” He heavily grunted and pulled down on the machine handles. Under the sudden change in force, the machine’s display began rapidly flashing with numbers.

「60 kg」→「80 kg」→「100 kg」→「161 kg」→「162 kg」

Nie Yan released his grip on the handles when he couldn’t hold on any longer. “Hah...” He gasped heavily for breath.

The value was too lacking when compared to his previous self. However, relatively speaking, it could already be regarded as pretty good with his current physique.

The following machine tested how much weight he could squat. Nie Yan walked up to it and began bearing its increasing weight on his back.

「80 kg」→「90 kg」→ ...

The number displayed on the machine steadily increased. It soon reached ninety kilograms, a weight which surpassed the limit of some amateur athlete fighters.

“Hey, what are you looking at?” Bao Wei asked, nudging Lin Jia beside him.

“How is this possible...?” Lin Jia muttered to herself while gazing in a certain direction. Her mind which was reeling back in extreme shock.

“What’s not possible?” Bao Wei turned his head to look in the same direction. He was left momentarily stunned as he stood there with his eyes widened and a blank expression on his face.

It was quite evident Nie Yan’s stature was on the somewhat small and thin side. Yet at this moment, his small body, which bore several times its own weight, was gradually lowering as he squatted down. If one looked, the screen on the squat machine

displayed a value of over one hundred and sixty kilograms! Such a scene was simply terrifying... What kind of monster was he?

In international competitions, there was no lack of athletes squatting well over a thousand kilograms. However, these people were all unequaled strong men who've gone through specialized training. For the average fighter, it was already quite excellent if they could squat two or three hundred kilograms. Within a small town like Ningjiang, the number of people who could squat over one hundred and sixty kilograms could still be counted on two hands. Just how did Nie Yan possess such a terrifying amount of strength with such a small and thin physique?

After getting one hundred and sixty kilograms on the squat machine, Nie Yan arrived beside the machine that tested punching strength. After a moment of stretching, Nie Yan entered a basic fighting stance. He resembled a cheetah in the moment he struck his fist out.「BOOM!」The sound of his fist hitting the machine reverberated. The screen on the machine displayed a punching force of one hundred and thirty kilograms.

「Punch Strength: A new record has been set!」

Since Ningjiang was a small town, it was even rarer for an expert to frequent a place like the Lin Family Martial Arts Facility. One hundred thirty kilograms was all it took to set a new record in a facility? Others in less remote regions would have felt this was some sort of joke.

My body's foundation isn't bad, Nie Yan thought, before walking over to the machine that tested reaction time.

Leg strength, arm strength, core strength, etc... were the basic foundations of a fighter. Therefore, even if Nie Yan hadn't learned any fighting techniques, he could still become a city-level athlete fighter. He could easily enter the finals of a city-level competition solely by relying on his physical prowess.

「Reaction Speed: A new record has been set!」

「Kick Strength: A new record has been set!」

「Running Speed: A new record has been set!」

Lin Jia was stunned as she watched Nie Yan set new records one after another in the facility. The world must have gone crazy. Was the person she looked at truly Nie Yan? As she recalled, Nie Yan had always been a feeble boy who would fall over from the slightest breeze. Who would have ever thought his inner aptitude was so surprisingly strong to an extent like this? All of the previous records in these machines were set by her father. However, six of them were now broken by Nie Yan. As for the others, Nie Yan's numbers were about the same as her father's. Since this was the case, wouldn't that mean Nie Yan was even stronger?

“Who is that guy? He's a monster...” Bao Wei asked as his voice slightly trembled. This guy is even stronger than the bodyguards back home. Thank god I didn't mess with him earlier. Otherwise, with his strength, a single kick would break several of my ribs...

Lin Jia had a sour feeling in her heart. Nie Yan had never shown

off in front of her in such a way before. If she had known he was this strong, she would have already tried getting in bed with him long ago. From her perspective, a woman needed to be conquered by a man. The stronger the man was, the more sense of security she would feel. If only she had known he was this strong earlier... So what if he was poor as hell? With his strength, if he applied to enter the number one military academy after graduation, she had no doubts he would easily be accepted. Entering the number one military academy was equivalent to possessing a bright future. She only now understood how blind and foolish she was in the past. She had mistaken a precious jade for a useless pebble.

My reaction speed still isn't fast enough, Nie Yan inwardly criticized. Reaction speed directly influenced the outcome of a fight. Moreover, reaction and thinking speed were both very important factors when playing Conviction as well.

A large crowd was gathered in a circle around the facility's arena. They were there to spectate the two fighters who were in the middle of a spar. At this moment, however, everyone's attention was drawn solely onto Nie Yan.

The crowd couldn't help but wonder, who was this terrifying brat?

A quiet sense of fear radiated throughout the facility. Nie Yan raised his head and discovered everyone was staring at him. He glanced at the arena and saw two heavily built men standing there. They were both around one hundred and eighty centimeters tall and their bodies were covered in robust muscles. With a single look, anyone could tell they had been training for a long time.

At that moment, Nie Yan was slightly itching to test out his skill. He stared at those two men and asked without a second thought, “Hey, you two over there. Are you guys interested in having a spar?”

“N-no, there’s no need!” The taller man in blue gym shorts hurriedly declined as he felt his legs go somewhat soft.

“No thanks, I’m fine as well!” The other man in red gyms shorts quickly declined as well. This was some sort of joke. Who in their right mind would fight someone who had a punching strength of a hundred thirty kilograms, and kicking of two hundred sixty kilograms? Let alone them, this kind of monster would even sweep all of his competition in city-level tournaments. A single punch from him, and they’d most likely be hospitalized for three months.

Nie Yan felt slightly disappointed after hearing their responses. It seems he wouldn’t get the opportunity to experience the pleasure of a fight today. He looked at the time and noticed his two hours were almost up. He then turned back and headed for the reception desk.

When Bao Wei who was standing beside the desk saw Nie Yan arriving, he revealed a flattering smile and made way for Nie Yan by retreating off to the side.

Lin Jia tidied up her hair and revealed what she considered a charming smile. Nie Yan, however, felt it was quite nauseating.

“I’m returning this.” Nie Yan threw the card on the counter.

“Brother Nie, there’s no need to pay the fee for the two hours here. Consider it as me treating you. Furthermore, here’s the reward for setting new records in the facility. Altogether, it’s twenty-six thousand.” Lin Jia took out a bank card and handed it over to Nie Yan.

All training facilities gave out established rewards. If a patron came in and set a new record on one of the machines, they would receive some reward money. This was a sort of business. The records for the various machines were connected throughout the entire country. If a record was set, and the higher the test results, it could raise the influence of a facility. Thus, in order to attract more experts to their place, establishments used methods such as giving out rewards.

Twenty-six thousand was roughly the amount of profit a large training facility made in a day.

“Thanks.” Nie Yan put the bank card in his pocket. Although he was disgusted by a person like Lin Jia, he wasn’t one to make life difficult for someone who was handing him money. After receiving this money, he could use it to buy better nutritional supplements.

“Brother Nie, I have some free time later tonight. Are you interested in having a drink with me at the Evening Trance tonight? It’s my treat,” Lin Jia asked, revealing an expression she considered to be seductive.

The Evening Trance was a well-known drinking establishment in Ningjiang. It was also rather high class with many sectioned off private rooms installed inside the establishment. Many of which were used to commit unsavory actions. Needless to say, Lin Jia's invitation was undoubtedly a dubious one. A man and a woman entering together in a private room, who wouldn't know what was going to happen?

Although Lin Jia was somewhat good looking, Nie Yan had met numerous beautiful women in his past life. Furthermore, how could Lin Jia ever compare to Xie Yao?

"I'm sorry, I'll have to decline," Nie Yan disinterestedly replied. He turned around and walked towards the exit.

Lin Jia originally believed by relying on her beauty she could seduce Nie Yan. She never expected that she would immediately have the door slammed right in front of her face. She stood there momentarily puzzled. Wasn't Nie Yan always secretly in love with her? Wasn't she returning the feelings he had written for her in that love letter? Nie Yan's cold and indifferent attitude left her somewhat angry and resentful.

Before walking out of the door, Nie Yan turned around and said, "When school starts, tell everyone in our class that I transferred schools and I'll visit them sometime in the future."

"You're transferring schools? Where?" Lin Jia asked in surprise.

"That's none of your business," Nie Yan replied, walking out of

the facility.

“Since that guy rejected you, I’m free tonight. How about we head to the Evening Trance together?” Bao Wei happily laughed. He then walked up and pinched Lin Jia’s soft bosom.

“Scram!” Lin Jia was in a terrible mood and angrily slapped Bao Wei’s hand away.

“Tsk... You’re just a cheap slut who’d sleep with anyone. What’s so great about you?” Bao Wei sneered after being rejected by Lin Jia and turned to leave.

Lin Jia gazed at Nie Yan’s retreating back and spat out in disdain. Peh! Aren’t you just a poor brat, yet you’re so high standard that even this lady here isn’t good enough for you? However, Lin Jia understood the reality of the situation. Nie Yan’s talents would most likely allow him to soar into the heavens. Thus, she could only stand there sourly and let out a few curses.

Chapter 41 – Vulgar Fellow

Nie Yan had a better understanding of his own strength after using the testing machines today. Although he was quite lacking compared to those expert fighters, he should still be able to handle himself if he came across unexpected circumstances.

With twenty-eight thousand dollars in reward money, Nie Yan headed to the department store to purchase ten or so tubes of nutritional supplements, which were enough to last him for the rest of the month.

Nie Yan continued exercising when he returned home. During the past few days, aside from gaming, he spent the rest of his time exercising and studying. As for other matters, he'd have to put them aside until his parents returned.

Just like this, half a day quickly passed by. It was near five in the evening and the game servers would be opening soon. Nie Yan reclined on the bed with the gaming helmet on his head.

As soon as he entered the game, he began to diligently train by grinding the surrounding Water Spiders. As several spiders met their deaths one after another by his hands, his experience bar gradually rose. He would level up shortly after ten or so mobs.

「Nie Yan, where are you right now?」Yao Yao asked Nie Yan through voice chat.

「I'm still at Lake Rando killing Water Spiders.」

「Come to the Tellak town transport point in five minutes. We're about to set off very soon. Bring that friend of yours over as well.」

「Alright,」Nie Yan replied.

「If that's all, I guess we'll meet in five minutes then.」

After disconnecting from the voice chat with Yao Yao, Nie Yan contacted Tang Yao. 「Tellak town transport point. Our team is about to head out soon. Quickly get over there.」

「This early?」Tang Yao replied in surprise. His tone contained eagerness and pleasant surprise.

「Generally, people run dungeons as early in the day as possible rather than later. Besides, it's better to set off in the morning compared to the afternoon or evening.」

「Gotcha, I'll head there right now,」Tang Yao replied and hurriedly prepared himself to leave.

Nie Yan checked his experience bar—Level 3, 99%. Filling up the remaining one percent would still require ten minutes of grinding at the very least. Since it appeared he didn't have enough time, he took out a return scroll and began unravelling it. After twenty seconds and a brilliant flash of light, the scenery before his eyes shifted. He had returned to town.

「Where are you? Coordinates?」Nie Yan asked Tang Yao through voice chat.

「Hey, I can see you. I'll come over, so stay where you are.」Tang Yao came walking over from the plaza in the distance. He was garbed from head to toe in a fiery red mage robe. It appeared especially conspicuous within the crowd and attracted the envious gazes of the surrounding players. Tang Yao had even unconsciously straightened his back and puffed out his chest.

The equipment he wore was a symbol of high honour because it represented the presence of an expert.

“So, how'd your practice at home go?” Nie Yan asked. Tang Yao appeared to be full of energy when Nie Yan gazed at him. He no longer looked like the depressed and dispirited player he remembered in his past life.

“Not bad. You'll know in just a bit. I didn't improve by just a small amount either! Hey, listen to this! When I logged off, that brat Wei Kai actually called me up. That guy surprisingly wanted to curry some favour with us. He even asked for your phone number. Anyway, I made him my training partner and had several dozen matches with him. That guy didn't even win a single match!”

“You sure he didn't just let you win?” Nie Yan asked with a smile. In his mind, he knew this was exactly Wei Kai's style of handling affairs.

“You’re underestimating me too much. I’m actually quite skillful now, y’know? Hey, when Wei Kai called me up in the afternoon, he said you went to the Lin Family Martial Arts Facility. You didn’t go there looking for Lin Jia, did you? I really couldn’t believe it. How could you possibly like that woman? I heard she’s already slept with many guys already.”

“That was back in middle school when I was still naive and young. Now, I don’t have any interest in her. I only went to the facility to test out my strength.”

“When I thought it over, I believed this was the most likely case as well. How could you possibly be attracted to Lin Jia? If you’re looking for a girl, this brother here can help introduce you to one!” Tang Yao laughed while he pat on Nie Yan’s shoulder.

“With the type of girls you’re acquainted with, it’s better if you keep them to yourself.” Nie Yan rolled his eyes at Tang Yao’s antics.

A sweet fragrance entered Nie Yan’s nose. The scent belonged to a lily perfume sold in NPC stores. It was simple, elegant, and pleasant to the nose. He knew exactly who had arrived the moment this scent entered his nose.

“All you think about is things like picking up girls all day. I knew you weren’t a good person.” Yao Yao muttered to herself.

Nie Yan knowingly smiled when he heard this voice. He turned his head and saw Yao Yao’s charming figure standing right behind

him. She was dressed in a pure white mage gown. It was like mercury falling, complementing her perfect body. Her hair hung down, and the pink [kerchief](#) she had tied over her head made her appear all the more lovely.

It was as if she walked out from the canvas of a beautiful painting.

Tang Yao stared at the beautiful Yao Yao standing by Nie Yan's side with saliva almost dripping from his mouth. He stood there with a blank expression for what seemed like half a day before elbowing Nie Yan in the side. "So beautiful! A first-rate beauty! Oh my God... Nie Yan, is this your girlfriend?"

"What are you saying? Who are you saying is his girlfriend?" Yao Yao's eyes widened into a furious glare. She was absolutely fuming. Before her eyes, this vulgar fellow surprisingly said she was Nie Yan's girlfriend. "Hmph! Indeed, birds of a feather do flock together..."

"Exactly, birds of a feather do flock together. Otherwise, you also wouldn't have come here looking for us!" Nie Yan laughed while teasing Yao Yao.

"Y-you... Hmph! This magnanimous lady is going to ignore you. Senior Sister Yu Lan (Blue Feather) and the rest of them are already at the transport point. Let's go and meet up with them." Since she couldn't outwit Nie Yan, Yao Yao quickly changed the subject.

Tang Yao suddenly realized something as he watched the Nie Yan and Yao Yao bickering. What was it called again? He seemed to have forgotten. Oh, that's right, it's definitely this! It was a lover's quarrel. He had seen many couples that enjoyed bickering like this before. Although Tang Yao himself was a person who was usually lecherous and full of hormones, he still held some principles. He might take away another person's woman, but when it came to his own brother's, he definitely wouldn't interfere.

Tang Yao mentally gave Nie Yan's a thumbs up and secretly whispered, "You do have some skill after all."

Tang Yao's mentality immediately diverged. From then on, he viewed Yao Yao as nothing more than a potential friend. Seeing this, Nie Yan couldn't help smiling; however, he was too lazy to explain. Besides, when it come to these matters, explaining them would only make things messier.

The three began walking in the direction of the transport point.

"Nie Yan, is this your friend? That guy has a vulgar appearance, but it looks like his equipment is pretty good. What kind of equipment is he wearing?" Yao Yao curiously asked.

Tang Yao's cheeks were streaming with tears. Why was this beautiful woman right beside him, when describing his appearance, not using words like confident, dashing, or crushingly handsome, but instead using words like vulgar?

"Fire Chaser Set," Nie Yan replied. He noticed Yao Yao's hair

beneath her kerchief was [folded into several layers](#). The irregular arrangement was quite charming and revealed it was done with the utmost care.

“The Fire Chaser Set dropped from Blackflame Forest?” Yao Yao exclaimed in surprise. She knew Blackflame Forest was a much more difficult dungeon compared to Treant Forest. Only the elite teams from large guilds would enter these dungeons! After realizing this, Yao Yao couldn’t help but look at Tang Yao in a new light. Those who were able to run Blackflame Forest were definitely experts. “I never expected this wretched fatty was actually a powerful expert.”

Tang Yao had advanced from a vulgar person into a wretched fatty.

However, after Yao Yao added that he was a powerful expert, Tang Yao felt slightly better—even somewhat proud of himself. He also had somewhat of a guilty conscious. This title of “expert” was merely a forgery. When compared to genuine experts, he was still lacking by a whole grade.

“Nie Yan, my kerchief is pretty isn’t it? It was a drop I got from farming in the Radiant Ruins. It’s Holy Damage +3.” Yao Yao did a little spin. Her fluttering mage gown resembled a [snow lotus](#) in bloom as her kerchief danced in the air. To an onlooker, it was especially moving. It seemed she still held the slight temperament of a child. If she had something nice, she couldn’t help but show it off. Moreover, the displeasure she held towards Nie Yan from their prior conversation appeared to have been completely forgotten.

“Mhmm, it does look very pretty,” Nie Yan replied with a nod of his head. Yao Yao had this magical characteristic about her. She was able to let any person completely forget about their worries.

“Brother, not bad... You should make your move at the first opportunity. Otherwise, she’ll get taken away by another person and it would be too late to regret by then!”

Chapter 42 – Temporary Team For Treant Forest

The three soon arrived at the transport point plaza. There a group of ten or so players was waiting together, grouped up like how the stars cupped themselves around the moon. At the center of their attention was a curvaceous beauty in azure armour.

“Senior Sister Yu Lan (Blue Feather), they’re here.” Yao Yao walked to Yu Lan’s side.

The two gorgeous beauties standing side by side was an especially stunning sight to behold.

“What luck! We’re encountering beauties as soon as we set out. So beautiful! So gorgeous!” Tang Yao softly whispered. This little scoundrel was a lecherous pervert who wouldn’t change even if you beat him to death. He enjoyed looking at beautiful women, but he knew very well that most of these beauties would never put him in their eyes. Therefore, he did nothing more than ogle.

“Pleasure to meet you,” Yu Lan said, facing Nie Yan and Tang Yao. She carefully observed Nie Yan. Although his appearance seemed somewhat juvenile, his calm and unhurried bearing made him look quite composed. The most noticeable trait was the air of confidence and decisiveness that surrounded him. Since she could still be regarded as experienced and knowledgeable, she could discern he possessed some of the special characteristics of an expert. He did indeed possess some of the special qualities of an expert. As for the fatty standing by his side... She didn’t know what to make of him.

“Likewise.” Nie Yan slightly nodded in reply. Yu Lan’s complete set of azure armour perfectly revealed the curves of her model-like figure. A glimpse of her deep cleavage could be seen in the opening near her chest. From head to toe, she radiated a fatal, wild attractiveness. She undoubtedly possessed the best figure out of all the women he had met before. Moreover, she had a beautiful face as well. This devastating combination was practically capable of seducing men to their deaths.

In spite of this, Nie Yan held no interest or desires towards her.

Tang Yao, however, had a little trouble shifting his gaze. When comparing Yao Yao and Yu Lan, the latter evidently suited his tastes much more.

“Take care, this beauty is someone even I don’t dare to provoke,” Nie Yan secretly informed Tang Yao.

“H-hello,” Tang Yao stumbled as he greeted her in an overly reserved manner.

Nie Yan’s eyes widened in surprise. This little scoundrel often couldn’t restrain himself when in front of beautiful women due to his perverted nature and natural tendencies as a chatterbox. However, today, Nie Yan was witnessing an unprecedented event. This chatterbox was acting quite shy and reserved! Am I dreaming? Did the sun rise from the west this morning?

“Alright, let’s get ready to set off for the dungeon. If you have

something to say, we'll talk on the road there." Yu Lan consistently paid attention to efficiency, thus she didn't want to waste any more time standing around.

"Remember our prior agreement. I'll be acting as team captain during the run, so I want everyone listening to my arrangements," Nie Yan promptly reminded Yu Lan. His gaze was sharp and resolute.

"Alright." Yu Lan nodded in reply. She turned around and addressed the rest of her team. "I'm disbanding the team. In a moment, accept Nie Yan's invite to form a team. He'll be temporarily acting as team captain, so listen to his arrangements!"

The rest of the members began heavily discussing. They were unfamiliar with Nie Yan. Therefore, in their hearts, they were somewhat unwilling to take commands from this stranger.

"Yu Lan, why do we have to take orders from this guy? If by any chance he doesn't know anything and ends up getting our team wiped, what do we do then?" The one who spoke was Chen Bo.¹ Nie Yan and Yao Yao's seemingly intimate relationship had caused a sense of crisis to arise. As a result, he regarded Nie Yan with an intense hostility.

Nie Yan wasn't unfamiliar with this Chen Bo. He was a classmate of Yu Lan and they were quite familiar with each other. In the past, he had always been pursuing Yu Lan, but after meeting Yao Yao, his mind went into a state of chaos. He liked all beauties. So, he didn't know which one he should pursue. Therefore, he decided to make both his property and became unwilling to let any others

come near the two. However, to his misfortune, both girls greatly disliked him and as a result, he ended up getting neither. Simply put, he was merely a useless brat with some wealth who got smitten with any beauty he laid eyes on.

In Nie Yan's past life, this scoundrel was a walking tragedy. In this life, after encountering Nie Yan, it appeared he was still destined to become a walking tragedy.

“You are...?”

“I'm called Chen Bo!”

晨勃 | Chen·Bo|

“Morning Wood? Ohh~ I see... So it was Elder Brother Morning Wood!” Nie Yan's tone dripped with sarcasm. He feigned surprise and acted as if Chen Bo's input held great importance.

“I said my name is Chen Bo!

陳

“The same ‘Chen’ as in the surname.

博 博大 | Bo·da|

“The ‘Bo’ in ‘enormous’!” Chen Bo replied in an irritated tone.

“I did say Morning Wood! I didn't speak incorrectly, did I?” Nie Yan innocently gazed at Tang Yao by his side.

Tang Yao clearly understood what was going on. Nie Yan was

simply messing with Chen Bo and mispronouncing his name on purpose. Tang Yao was practically dying as he held back a belly full of laughter. He restrained himself and said with a smiling expression, “Right, you didn’t speak incorrectly. You did say Morning Wood.” Tang Yao even purposefully enunciated the two words in a serious tone.

However, from the smiling expressions on their faces, it was clear they weren’t pronouncing Chen Bo’s name correctly and pronouncing it as ‘Morning Wood’ instead.

Granted even if the person were an idiot, they would clearly understand what was going on. Yao Yao flashed a beautiful smile as two dimples emerged on her face. She shot a glance at Nie Yan, feigning displeasure. This guy is too awful. You can’t just humiliate people like this...

The majority of people she and Yu Lan met were quite reserved while in front of them. That being said, Nie Yan’s frank and forthright manner of speaking didn’t arouse her disgust. On the contrary, she felt Nie Yan was different from people like Chen Bo who often hid their true intentions and acted in an extremely hypocritical manner.

Yu Lan also slightly showed signs of being unable to hold back her laughter. Seeing Chen Bo on the brink of lividness, she hurriedly took on the role of peacemaker and said, “Forget it, he was just joking around. Nie Yan, go create the team.”

Nie Yan sent everyone in Yu Lan’s group an invite, Chen Bo included.

Chen Bo had the faint urge of lashing out.

Nie Yan fixed his expression and announced in a stern and severe tone, “If you’ve accepted me as team captain, you will unconditionally obey my commands as long as you’re within my team. If you have any misgivings or objections, you can come looking for me after the run and settle it then. Anyone unwilling is free to leave the team right now. We can still find others to fill your spot. If you attempt to cause mischief or join with malicious intent, even if the team is completely wiped during the run, the ones suffering losses, in the end, are still yourselves. Twenty percent of your experience bar... I think it’ll still take quite some time to fill back up, right?”

As Nie Yan spoke, he simultaneously swept his gaze over everyone present. His imposing stature was reminiscent of a true leader. Not a single person dared to look him straight in the eye. The crowd slowly discussed amongst themselves. After a short while, the people in the group began subsequently accepting the invitation.

「System: Yu Lan has joined your team.」

「System: Yao Yao has joined your team.」

「System: Bottled Water has joined your team.」

...

Nie Yan was quite imposing. Yu Lan's eyes flashed with praise after evaluating his performance. Perhaps he really could carry them through the Treant Forest.

Yu Lan followed in a stern tone as well, "Regard Nie Yan's orders as team captain as if they were given by me. Anyone who fails to comply might as well quit the team, because in the future... our team will no longer have such a person."

The crowd immediately quieted down. As her own team members, they knew this type of order was extremely severe. After being in a team with each other for so long, they were quite familiar with one another and had established amicable friendships with their surrounding teammates. If they were forced to leave the team, where would they go? Even if they found another team, one that was capable of running a twenty-player dungeon like Treant Forest was extremely difficult to find!

Chen Bo held a resentful expression and was prepared to speak out.

However, Yu Lan's severe gaze suddenly focused on him. Chen Bo, who was on the verge of speaking his mind, immediately swallowed his words back down his throat.

「System: Chen Bo has joined your team.」

"Since all of you have already entered my team, don't blame me if I immediately kick you for disobeying orders. Our objective here

is the same. We're here for the sake of getting some equipment and nothing else. If things go smoothly, we may even be able to pick up even more equipment. If no issues arise, everyone here can gain at least twenty percent experience. If there's anyone who wants to secretly sabotage the run, the damages inflicted on the entire team will be solely placed on them. The people next to you are all your fellow companions! Don't think it's necessary to make things difficult for your own people. If it appears I'm unsuitable to lead and cause mistakes to arise, I'll hand over ten silvers to your captain, which can be considered compensation for you team!" Nie Yan said. He swept his gaze over everyone present and stopped on Chen Bo.

If it weren't for the fact this expert level dungeon dropped a certain jewel, he wouldn't have even bothered coming here.

Many players within the group were quite dissatisfied with Nie Yan. However, they had no choice but to concede. Nie Yan's words were quite reasonable. If they absolutely wanted to make things difficult for him, it would be the same as making things difficult for themselves. Harming others without benefitting yourself? It wasn't worth the trouble. They could only oblige themselves to listen to Nie Yan for the time being. He even gave his word and said he'd compensate the team with ten silvers if huge mistakes occurred because he was unsuitable as team captain. This could already be regarded as extremely benevolent.

"We've already been wiped in this dungeon twice. It wouldn't be a strange matter if we ended up getting wiped once again. Besides, those elite teams from the large guilds frequently get wiped all the time too. We're going to the Treant Forest simply to feel things out. As for those tens silvers, how could we possibly be so

shameless as to ask Brother Nie Yan for it?” The one who spoke within the team was a Fighter called Bai Kaisui (Plain Boiled Water). He could be regarded as one of those players who were fair and just.

One by one, the surrounding members also began agreeing with his reasoning, and their impression of Nie Yan somewhat changed as well.

Notes:

[1\]](#) Chen Bo appears in [chapter 17](#) for the first time.

Chapter 43 – Prior To Departure

“Since that’s the case, I’ll start handing out orders now. If anyone’s dissatisfied with me, they put can forward their own suggestions. As long as it’s within reason, I’ll be happy to oblige,” Nie Yan said. Since his previous speech was effective, and Yu Lan’s leadership could still be considered competent, he shouldn’t have any problems leading this group of players through the dungeon.

“I’d like everyone to announce their names and character information, starting from the Fighter over there,” Nie Yan announced. If the most basic stat requirements weren’t met, even if the team possessed a strong expert, it would be incredibly difficult for them to clear the dungeon. In other words, even if he knew how to pass through the dungeon, he’d first need each member of his team to meet the basic stat requirements to even attempt it.

“Bai Kaisui (Plain Boiled Water), Fighter, sixty-one defense, two hundred and thirty health, and twenty-seven attack,” Bai Kaisui replied. He was the one who had spoken up for Nie Yan earlier. He had the appearance of a slightly rugged man in his late twenties and a robust body that resembled an ox. He was the team’s main tank. With a single glance, you knew he was made to be a Warrior.

“Steamed Dumpling (Feishui Zhujiaozi), calling me Dumpling is fine. I’m a Fighter, fifty-one defense, one hundred and sixty health, and twenty-eight attack.”

“Blaze, Elementalist, thirty-two magic damage.”

...

“Bai Kaisui, I want you to go and buy a Basic Haste Scroll. Pumpkin (Nan Gua), I want you to go and buy a Basic Strength Scroll...” Nie Yan issued orders after they were all accounted for.

Many of the players within the team looked at each other with embarrassed expressions. Among the average player, they were considered relatively strong experts with deep pockets, but in reality, the total wealth they had on hand absolutely didn't exceed one silver. Items like Basic Haste Scrolls, Basic Strength Scrolls, Basic Intellect Scrolls, etc., easily cost upwards of twenty copper. Wasn't this kind of expenditure rather extreme? Even if they cleared the Treant Forest, they were still unsure of the profit they'd receive.

“Hmph! Buying so many scrolls... If I was the leader and had so many scrolls, we'd be able to clear the dungeon too,” Chen Bo muttered to himself.

Chen Bo was repeatedly making things difficult for Nie Yan. Tang Yao, who had witnessed all of this on the side, was put in quite a foul mood.

“Could it be that you can't afford it? If you don't have the money to buy something as cheap as a scroll, I can always lend you a bit first,” Tang Yao provoked, staring at Chen Bo with a disdainful gaze.

“Twenty coppers is nothing. It's not like this young master here

can't afford it. However, this guy here clearly has selfish motives. Why isn't he making you buy Basic Intellect Scrolls, and instead making us spend all the money?" Chen Bo retorted without holding back any accusations.

Chen Bo's accusations gave rise to doubts among the crowd as they stared suspiciously at Nie Yan. They were all in a team together. However, if Nie Yan clearly favoured his own people and deliberately made their side spend more money, then that would simply be an extremely callous and deceptive behavior—one that they could not tolerate.

During the whole ordeal, Tang Yao wasn't able to give the reason why. The corner of Chen Bo's mouth curved into a sneer and he said, "What? You don't have anything to say now?"

The surrounding crowd waited for Nie Yan's reply. If he didn't give them a suitable explanation, the crowd most likely wouldn't let him off so easily.

"You figured something out? You haven't figured out piss. My brother is wearing the full Fire Chaser set. His magic damage is already over fifty. Does he need to buy Basic Intellect Scrolls then? He already has a hard enough time controlling his damage as it is. Does he need a Basic Intellect Scroll to increase his magic damage further? Do you want the boss to switch aggro and split him in half?" Nie Yan ruthlessly rebuked.

Nie Yan's words held another implication: With the equipment Tang Yao possessed, the elite teams from large guilds would be more than happy to have him if he wanted to run a dungeon with

them. Accompanying Yu Lan's team into the dungeon was the same as using a sledgehammer to crack a walnut; it was simply a waste of his talents! It was already a show of respect by showing up here, yet they still wanted to make more demands and even threw out accusations?

Many of the team members after hearing Nie Yan's words held faces full of shame. Their expressions greatly changed as they gazed the equipment on Tang Yao's body. This was, in fact, the Fire Chaser set. It was a symbol of honour. It was a sign that a player had conquered Blackflame Forest! If Tang Yao had already cleared Blackflame Forest, it meant he had long since gotten everything he needed from a lower level dungeon like Treant Forest. Yet, he had still come back here to run this dungeon with them. This alone meant he was giving their team a tremendous amount of face.

Seeing the changed expressions of the surrounding crowd, Tang Yao subconsciously straightened his back. Being adored and respected by the crowd made him feel rather satisfied. Thus, Tang Yao inwardly confirmed his resolve. If I'm going to wear this kind of equipment, I shouldn't lose any face. At the very least, I've got to show the bearing of an expert.

Chen Bo was momentarily left speechless. Nie Yan had ruthlessly suppressed him, and he simply had no means to retort.

Yu Lan glanced at Tang Yao and carefully examined the equipment on his body. Even I couldn't recognize it at first... This wretched fatty is actually an expert!

“I want everyone who was called out to go and buy their respective scrolls,” Yu Lan ordered. However, she was left wondering... Even if they cleared the Treant Forest, would they still be able to gain a positive return after buying so many scrolls?

The members whose names were mentioned left to purchase scrolls. They had already bought all the consumables they needed beforehand, so making a return trip to the stores wouldn't waste too much time.

“Nie Yan, do we really need so many scrolls to clear Treant Forest?” Yao Yao asked while her elegant eyes stared fixedly at Nie Yan. From her memory, the larger teams she knew didn't use this many scrolls when they cleared Treant Forest.

“You'll know when the time comes. I am absolutely not wasting money by making them buy these scrolls,” Nie Yan replied. Even if it were the elite teams from the large guilds, he reckoned they only cleared the Normal difficulty Treant Forest. However, the difficulty he was aiming for was the hardest one—Specialist!¹ It was impossible for them to clear the run without these scrolls.

“En.” Yao Yao blinked and nodded her head. Despite only knowing Nie Yan for several days, she was certain of one little thing: He was definitely someone who was capable and in no way would do something for no reason.

After a short while, the people who were called out returned with their scrolls purchased.

Nie Yan did roll call. All nineteen people—including him—were present and accounted for.

“Is there anyone here who can invite a strong Mage to join us? I’d be more reassured if there was another high damage Mage with us,” Nie Yan asked Yu Lan and her team.

“That’s going to be a little hard to do...” Yu Lan replied in a somewhat awkward tone. For the most part, Mages who had high damage were already in fixed teams, so where could they go looking for one?

“I can find one. I have a classmate who belongs in Radiant Sacred Flame guild’s elite team. Their team has recently been preparing for Blackflame Forest, but by chance, my classmate has some free time today,” Yao Yao interjected.

“Male or female? How’s their skill?” Yu Lan asked.

“He’s a male and really strong too,” Yao Yao replied.

“Radiant Sacred Flame guild? Forget it then,” Nie Yan shook his head and said.

“Why?” Yao Yao inquisitively asked.

“I’ve already killed several of their guild members. Right now, they have a hit order on me,” Nie Yan straightforwardly replied without holding anything back. Even if the Radiant Sacred Flame

guild knew he was here, what could they do about it?

“Last time, everyone in my party except for me was wiped out by the Radiant Sacred Flame guild. My brother here singlehandedly killed seven or eight of them to save me.” Tang Yao proudly flaunted Nie Yan’s accomplishments. He couldn’t help but show off to everyone present that he and Nie Yan were brothers.

“They were a weak group. All their players were full of beginners,” Nie Yan didn’t feel it was anything significant.

“I say, you only killed off a few noobs and you think you’re so terrific? I’ve killed entire teams before!” Chen Bo suddenly interrupted. A sneer was on his face, and his expression was full of ridicule.

Chen Bo’s words infuriated Tang Yao by no small amount. The players Nie Yan killed were by no means beginners. Among them, there was even a player with the full Fire Chaser set! He was just about to retort, but Nie Yan held him back. Thus he could only suppress his anger in silence.

Yu Lan crossed her arms across her chest and examined Nie Yan. Since he wasn’t a brash person who liked to flaunt his accomplishments, it appeared Tang Yao’s words were most likely true. After all, those who were able to corner an expert level figure like Tang Yao definitely couldn’t be simple. It seemed Nie Yan wasn’t only skillful in dungeons, but in player versus player situations as well.

Chapter 44 – Dusk, The Arcane Mage

“Who are we going to find then?” Yao Yao asked. She believed even if her classmate was part of the Radiant Sacred Flame guild, it wasn’t as if he and Nie Yan were ever in direct conflict. Therefore, it didn’t necessarily mean their tensions couldn’t be eased. Perhaps in the future, she could even introduce them to one another and have them get to know each other. However, she chose to put this idea off until another time.

After giving it some thought, Bai Kaisui (Plain Bottled Water) interjected with his own suggestion. “I know a person. They’re an Arcane Mage from Holy Empire. His name is Dusk (Huang Hun) and his magic damage is fifty-two. Though... I don’t know if he’d be interested in running this dungeon with us. He and his team have already cleared Blackflame Forest and are preparing for the Agmota Muddy Swamplands, so I don’t know if he’d be willing to come back to Treant Forest again. I’ll give him a call anyway.”

...

A brief moment later, Yu Lan asked, “Bai Kaisui, how did it go? Is he willing?”

“He agreed!” Bai Kaisui replied in excitement. This truly was unexpected. They had only met several times in the past when they partied up to grind mobs. Dusk had given Bai Kaisui quite a bit of face by agreeing to come.

“Great! We now have exactly twenty players. We’ll set out the

moment he arrives,” Nie Yan said, nodding his head. Surprisingly, it was someone from Holy Empire. A great opportunity was presenting itself to him.

“Ah! Brother Bai Kaisui does indeed possess a lot of face. He’s even able to invite someone from Holy Empire!” Chen Bo praised. He shot a glance at Nie Yan and Tang Yao. If this dungeon run were to go without a hitch, he couldn’t say for sure they wouldn’t be frequent additions to their team activities. He had to find some way of driving these two uninvited guests out of the team and maybe even rope in a few others to help him.

“How can that be? He’s the one who’s giving me face.” Bai Kaisui was practically glowing with joy. He also felt quite proud of his accomplishment.

“That kind of person is a true expert. His team is already preparing to run the Agmota Muddy Swamplands! He’s definitely cleared Treant Forest, so I think it’s best if we make that person the team captain instead.” Chen Bo shot a glance at Nie Yan and Tang Yao.

This bastard Chen Bo infuriated Tang Yao by no small measure. If it weren’t for Nie Yan who held him back, he would have lashed out long ago.

“True, if he’s cleared Treant Forest before, it wouldn’t be a bad idea to let him be team captain,” Nie Yan replied in a dull tone.

“Oh, so you realized your own incompetence? If you had realized

it earlier, then there wouldn't have been a need for you to foolishly show off!" Since Chen Bo was given an inch, he attempted to take a mile. He was a person with no sense of propriety.

"Chen Bo..." Yu Lan knitted her brows and called out in a displeased tone. She was rather annoyed with his behavior.

Met with Yu Lan's reaction, Chen Bo muttered a few words to himself but no longer said anything more.

...

After a short while, the surrounding area flashed with a brilliant light and a figure emerged from the Tellak town transport point. It was an Arcane Mage who wore a black-coloured mage robe. The man had the appearance of a person in their late twenties. His black mage robes were inscribed with various strange magical runes and he exuded a mysterious and dignified aura. Nie Yan gave him a quick glance. He could tell this person was wearing the Arcane Mage's Dark Winter set. Presently, it was a top-notch equipment set for Arcane Mages. This set and Tang Yao's Fire Chaser set were both on the same level. However, the Fire Chaser set suited Elementalists more while the Dark Winter set suited Arcane Mages. Therefore, for an Arcane Mage, the Dark Winter set was much more preferable than the Fire Chaser set.

"Hey, Brother Dusk. Long time no see!" Bai Kaisui walked forward to welcome him.

"Long time no see." Dusk also walked up and exchanged

greetings with Bai Kaisui. He gave the crowd a quick glance and said, "Hello everyone." These words were spoken with a slight arrogance. He was a member of Holy Empire's elite team. His elite team and Yu Lan's small team were on a completely different level. He decided to come because Bai Kaisui's personality was decent and he had a slight friendship with him. Moreover, he had some free time because his team was making preparations for the Agmota Muddy Swamplands. If it weren't for these two factors, he wouldn't have even bothered paying this small team any attention.

"This is our team captain, Yu Lan." Bai Kaisui introduced Yu Lan to his friend.

Dusk nodded at Yu Lan and smiled. "I didn't expect your team captain was actually such a beauty. Pleased to meet your acquaintance," Dusk greeted Yu Lan. This was their first meeting, and he didn't reveal the slightest bit of impoliteness when met with a beauty such as Yu Lan. He appeared refined and courteous without lacking the slightest bit of elegance.

Yu Lan replied with the slight nod of her head. "Pleased to meet you." This Dusk did indeed possess the bearing of an expert.

Chen Bo shuffled to Bai Kaisui's side. He hoped Bai Kaisui would lend him a helping hand in introducing him to the expert. However, when Dusk noticed Nie Yan standing at the back of the crowd, his eyes widened in surprise and he walked over to greet Nie Yan.

"I never thought Brother Nie Yan would be in a place like this!" Dusk exclaimed in a pleasantly surprised tone.

“You are?” Nie Yan mumbled as if trying to recall who this person was. He remembered now. Back at Link town, there was such a person standing by Sleepy Fox’s side.

“You don’t recognize me, but I recognize you! Previously when our guild leader invited you to run the Agmota Muddy Swamplands, I was standing right behind him. Brother Nie Yan truly is skilled. You managed to trip Swift Slash (Lima Hengdao) and cause him to fall at the most crucial moment!” Dusk was in high spirits as he mentioned Nie Yan’s accomplishments.

When the surrounding crowd heard Dusk’s words, they cast their curious gazes towards Nie Yan and wondered just what kind of background he had. He even knew Holy Empire’s guild leader! As for Swift Slash, they seemed to recall he was the Dark Massacre’s guild leader. Every person Nie Yan had come in contact with had a terrifying amount of influence.

“You know Brother Nie Yan?” Bai Kaisui asked with an astonished expression.

“Not only do I know him, Brother Nie Yan is even currently a celebrity among our Holy Empire guild members. When our guild leader invited him to run the Agmota Muddy Swamplands together, Brother Nie Yan imposed the harsh demand of getting the first pick on all Thief equipment. Not a single person in our guild would have dared to speak in such a way to our guild leader, but surprisingly our guild leader agreed to Brother Nie Yan’s conditions!” Dusk replied. He was a straightforward person and he didn’t attempt to conceal any of the admiration he held for Nie

Yan.

The crowd looked at each other in shock. Who was Sleepy Fox? He was the guild leader of Holy Empire—a legendary player among the player base! Nie Yan even set conditions when the guild leader of Holy Empire invited him to run the Agmota Muddy Swamplands together? Didn't this clearly signify Sleepy Fox was the one currying favour with Nie Yan?

As the guild leader of Holy Empire, how could Sleepy Fox's judgement possibly be lacking?

Going by that logic, wouldn't this mean Nie Yan was a god-like figure who didn't heed the most elite teams even if they begged him to come? If that was the case, Nie Yan's conditions for running Treant Forest with their own team were actually rather light.

Dusk was a member of Holy Empire. It was unlikely his words were a lie.

"Yao Yao, it seems you actually invited an esteemed expert to help us," Yu Lan teased in a joking manner.

Yao Yao's eyebrow curved into crescents. Her face was brimming with joy from the pride she felt.

Chen Bo didn't anticipate Nie Yan to have such a powerful background. He finally became aware that he and Nie Yan weren't on the same standing. As if he were a shrivelled eggplant, he stood

foolishly to the side, seething in anger when a malicious thought came to mind. He definitely had to make Nie Yan pay a heavy price for crossing his path.

When the crowd gazed at Nie Yan, their eyes flashed with a peculiar glint. Each and every one of them was trying to guess what sort of background he had.

Tang Yao was the happiest among all of them. He elbowed Nie Yan in the side and whispered, “Not bad! You really did conceal yourself well. When did you meet the guild leader of Holy Empire?”

“Yesterday,” Nie Yan calmly replied. The respect he gained wasn’t given by others. Rather, it was acquired by himself. Truthfully speaking, if he didn’t have any skill, it wouldn’t have mattered how much face Sleepy Fox gave him—it would all be useless. His present goal was still to clear the Treant Forest. He put other matters aside for now.

He was attempting a difficulty even the most elite of teams didn’t dare to rashly attempt—Specialist!

“Since everyone’s here, let’s set off,” Nie Yan ordered. He then began walking in the direction of the town exit.

“Brother Nie Yan, why are you still running Treant Forest?” Dusk curiously asked. He reasonably believed Nie Yan had absolutely no reason to waste his time on this sort of low-level dungeon with his level of skill.

“I want the Treant King’s Featherfall Jewel. Also, this dungeon drops some of the better Thief equipment. Perhaps one or two of them will drop during this run,” Nie Yan replied. In any case, everyone would eventually find out what he was planning when they arrived at the dungeon, so it wasn’t necessary for him to hide anything. Besides, his impression of Dusk was rather decent.

Chapter 45 – Specialist Difficulty

“Featherfall Jewel? What kind of item is that? We’ve run this dungeon five or six times in the past and we’ve never once gotten any ‘Featherfall Jewel,’” Dusk exclaimed in surprise.

Dusk didn’t know what the Featherfall Jewel was because it was only a drop on the Specialist difficulty. Moreover, it’d only drop from the Treant King. The dungeon’s difficulty changed depending on the overall level of the team—if there were more high-level players in the team, the dungeon’s difficulty would increase to compensate.

If players wanted to clear the Specialist Treant Forest, it definitely wouldn’t be an easy task. Even the elite teams from large guilds would have quite a hard time in clearing the dungeon. With this fact in mind, the Featherfall Jewel’s value became even more apparent.

“You’ll know when the time comes,” Nie Yan replied in a dull tone.

Dusk felt slightly puzzled. However, after giving it some thought, he realized since Nie Yan wasn’t telling him now, he’d eventually find out with the rest of the team later!

“This Tang Yao’s equipment is a bit strange. He’s clearly an Arcane Mage, but why is he wearing the Fire Chaser set?” Dusk asked in a confused tone.

Normally, with the way equipment distribution was managed in teams, the Elementalists of the team would definitely have priority on drops such as the Fire Chaser set. So, it was quite strange for the set to be given to an Arcane Mage.

Nie Yan replied with a faint smile but didn't bother explaining.

Tang Yao slightly reddened in embarrassment upon hearing their conversation. He really did have somewhat of a guilty conscious when wearing this Fire Chaser set. However, this made him even more determined. He definitely needed to get a hold of a first-rate equipment set for his profession with his own power. Only then could he gain some confidence and have some self-respect for himself.

“Nie Yan, how did you meet the Holy Empire's guild leader?” Yao Yao asked. Her bright and curious gaze made her appear especially cute.

“In reality, it isn't as amazing as you're all thinking it to be.” Nie Yan then narrated yesterday's events to Yao Yao. However, he left out the matter regarding the Chapter of Courage.

“I still can't help but think you're quite amazing,” Yao Yao earnestly said. However, if this matter wasn't related to Sleepy Fox, she also wouldn't have thought this highly of Nie Yan.

“I still feel the event was a little strange. Why would a dragon all of a sudden invade the town for no reason? Generally, Elite-and Lord-class monsters don't leave their territories,” Dusk curiously

remarked. He still remained quite puzzled over the whole situation. Calling this sort of event rare was quite an understatement.

Nie Yan glanced at the Chapter of Courage in his bag. He sincerely hoped no one connected the appearance of the Guardian of Order with him.

“What’s so strange about that? The game developers probably had the monster siege the town as an event for the players. You know, to spice things up and add some excitement. Something like this isn’t rare at all in these sort of games,” Tang Yao said in a matter-of-fact tone. His comment had unintentionally aided Nie Yan by explaining the matter away.

“Ah, you’re probably right.” Dusk nodded in agreement.

After the party of twenty players passed through a wide open prairie, they were met with a lush and verdant forest at the base of a faraway mountainside. There an eerie mist lingered, appearing as if it would encircle the dense forest eternally. This area was a well known twenty-player dungeon—Treant Forest. It took more than ten minutes of travel time to reach this destination from Tellak town.

Many players idled at the entrance of the forest. Most of them were other twenty-player teams who were here to run the dungeon as well.

“It seems Treant Forest is also pretty lively. There sure are many

people here.”

“The average players have leveled up. If they want better equipment, they have no choice but to run the dungeons.”

Treant Forest was still relatively difficult for the average player. The equipment dropped were also much better than the ones dropped from common dungeons. Most teams were unable to clear the dungeon, but it was still worth the run for the experience and potential dropped items. After all, if a team was unable to advance any further, they could simply withdraw from the dungeon. Although the Honour points they'd be missing out on wasn't few, the majority of teams running the dungeons weren't elites from the large guilds, so they didn't care much about gaining Honour. Therefore, whether Honour points were lost or not, it was fine as long as the team wasn't wiped.

Presently within Conviction, there were in total thirty-six Level 5 or below twenty-player dungeons scattered across the Viridian Empire's domain. Their difficulties differed, but out of the thirty-six, six of these dungeons were particularly challenging. They even required teams to attain a certain amount of Honour before being allowed to enter. The rest of the dungeons had no such requirements.

“I'm a thirty-seven magic damage Holy Mage! Looking for a team to enter Treant Forest with!”

“I'm a thirty-five defense, one hundred seventy health, and sixty-seven attack Berserker! Looking for a team to enter Treant Forest with!”

The entrance of the dungeon was bustling with activity. Many of the players gathered there were seeking teams. When they saw Nie Yan's group arriving, they ran towards him asking if there was any space.

“Boss, invite me to the team please.”

“Brother, is your team lacking any members?”

Bai Kaisui (Plain Boiled Water) walked forward to deal with the crowd. “We're full. Everyone, go look somewhere else please.”

Upon hearing Bai Kaisui's words, the surrounding players had no choice but to leave in low spirits.

“You guys wait here. I'm going to apply to enter the dungeon,” Nie Yan announced and began walking over to the glowing monolith near the dungeon's entrance. When he neared it, he extended his hand and touched it whereupon he felt a bizarre sensation enter his mind.

「Before entering this lush forest, you happen upon a strange block of stone. The stone block is engraved with various eccentric writing, which read as follows: “Forest Walkers (Treants): they absorb dew under the light of the early morning sun. The sound of a caretaker's flute floats between the leaves. The tree spirits that have slumbered since the times of antiquity, awaken!” You are reminded, an official from the Viridian Empire told you there were signs of activity from Dark Elves in this area. You mutter to

yourself, “These damn Dark Elves! When will they stop?”」

「System: Do you wish to enter Treant Forest?」

Yes!

Nie Yan hit confirm.

「System: Please select a difficulty. (Easy, Normal, Hard, Expert, Specialist)」

Specialist!

「System: Are you sure?」

Yes!

In the moment Nie Yan confirmed his selection, a brilliant light flashed through the eyes of each and every team member. When they regained their vision, they noticed they had emerged on a thick patch of grass within the forest. Although the sunlight was still able to penetrate through the foliage of the trees, the atmosphere surrounding the area still remained somewhat sinister and eerie.

「System: You have entered Treant Forest! (Difficulty: Specialist)」

The other nineteen members of the team also received the same notification. Each and every one of them looked on in horror upon reading it.

“Why is it Specialist difficulty?”

“Captain Nie Yan, did you pick the wrong difficulty! Why is it Specialist?”

“Yeah, how can we possibly clear Specialist difficulty?” The surrounding team members were anxious and worried.

Yu Lan looked over at Nie Yan and noticed his expression was still unperturbed. From what she knew of his personality, how could he possibly make such a rudimentary mistake? Unless... he intentionally chose this difficulty! If she recalled correctly, no one had ever cleared—or more so, even dared to attempt—Treant Forest on Specialist so far. Let alone Treant Forest, even the lowest level dungeons would become unreasonably difficult on Specialist difficulty,

“Since I brought you guys in, I naturally have a method to bring you out,” Nie Yan calmly announced.

“What kind of bullshit are you spouting!? Up until now, there hasn’t been a single team who’s been able to clear Treant Forest on Specialist and you think we of all people can do it? Our team can’t even clear this f*cking dungeon on Easy! Don’t drag us into your mess just because you want to show off!” Chen Bo ridiculed in an extremely irritated tone.

“Is this guy really your friend?” Upon witnessing Chen Bo’s rude outburst, Dusk who was by Nie Yan’s side could no longer remain silent.

“No, he’s not.” Nie Yan shook his head.

“If a team member dared to speak so rudely to our captain in the team, he would’ve been kicked by the captain long ago. No one would allow such a person to speak so much rubbish in the first place!” Dusk sneered. However, he didn’t look at Chen Bo. He didn’t even bother acknowledging the existence his words were referencing to. He turned to face Nie Yan who was by his side, and said with a smile, “I must say, Brother Nie is quite a tolerant person.”

From Dusk’s perspective, Nie Yan chose the Specialist difficulty because he had the confidence to clear it. This run actually held some meaning to it now. Initially, he only came here to grind mobs to kill time. Who would have expected he’d meet a rare opportunity instead.

Chen Bo was infuriated, but what could he do? Dusk was invited to the run by Bai Kaisui, so offending him was the same as offending Bai Kaisui. If this were to occur, it would inevitably lead him to become ostracized on the team.

“Chen Bo... Nie Yan is a friend I personally invited to the run. If you have any complaints regarding my decision, be upfront about it and tell me instead,” Yao Yao sharply rebuked and knitted her

brows. It was most likely for her sake that Nie Yan didn't bother with Chen Bo, or lower himself to Chen Bo's level. After all, Nie Yan didn't want to Yao Yao to be shunned for inviting a friend who made trouble within their team. If she didn't speak out for Nie Yan now, it would be too much of a disgrace.

“Yao Yao! It's not like that...” Chen Bo hurriedly tried to explain when he saw Yao Yao was getting upset.

However, Yao Yao coldly snorted and turned her head away.

“I'm only someone who was invited to their team. I'll be leaving after we clear this run. Everyone else is simply cooperating with me. After all, I'm not the captain of any team. The real team captain is this beauty over there,” Nie Yan explained to Dusk and glanced at Yu Lan by his side. Truthfully, Nie Yan wasn't such a tolerant person. Chen Bo had already crossed the line and offended him long ago. Therefore Nie Yan would certainly teach him a proper lesson in the future. However, when handling a type of person like Chen Bo, Nie Yan would simply be degrading himself if he were to deal with him directly.

“You—”

“Chen Bo, shut your mouth right now! Otherwise, don't blame me for being impolite!” Yu Lan scolded. She then apologized to Nie Yan. “I'm really sorry. He just has this sort of unpleasant temper. I'd like to apologize to Brother Nie Yan on his behalf.”

Yu Lan also felt quite humiliated because of Chen Bo's behavior.

She and Chen Bo had been classmates for over ten years. Their parents were on good terms with each other, so she couldn't afford to act too coldly towards Chen Bo.

Chen Bo never thought even Yu Lan would speak up against him for the sake of these strangers. He stared daggers at Nie Yan and Dusk, then resentfully turned his head away.

Dusk also felt bickering with Chen Bo would only be degrading himself, so he changed the topic. "I assume Brother Nie Yan has already made the necessary preparations? Otherwise, you wouldn't have selected Specialist difficulty." Since he was one of the people under Sleepy Fox's command, he also wanted to examine how much ability Nie Yan had.

"Specialist isn't actually that difficult. The mob health is only increased by thirty percent. It's quite easy to handle if we have tanks with enough defense and Mages with high damage. However, the changes to the boss, Treant King, are quite distinct. I'll let you guys know about them when the times comes," Nie Yan reassured the rest of the team.

Nie Yan had spoken as if the whole matter was trivial, but Dusk understood the true significance of mobs gaining thirty percent extra health. What did it mean? It meant if the tank fell short by even one percent of health, or lacked even a single point of defense, their team would be wiped. It meant if the Mages were lacking by even a single point of damage, their team would be wiped! Just where did Nie Yan's confidence come from?

Chapter 46 – The Prowess Of A True Thief

“Nie Yan, are you really sure we can do it?” Yao Yao said, gently nudging Nie Yan with her arm. The expression in her eyes was filled with worry.

“Rest assured, there won’t be any problems.”

Yao Yao’s actions couldn’t be considered excessively intimate; however, Chen Bo thought otherwise. He believed Nie Yan was stepping out of line by being too overly close with Yao Yao. As a consequence, the resentment and hatred in his eyes only grew all the more extreme as he covertly gazed at the two.

The team of twenty slowly advanced deeper into the forest. The Warriors and Paladins were on the frontline, and the Mages were in the back. Under Nie Yan’s repeated warnings, no players were more than two meters apart from each other.

“Brother Chen, how about you come in front and scout the path ahead?” Nie Yan suggested. The corner of his eyes flashed with a cold, peculiar light. Chen Bo had a hypocritical and petty personality. Therefore, he would firmly hold onto a grudge if even the slightest enmity occurred between the two of them. By making him lose face, Nie Yan had already thoroughly offended him. Despite this, Nie Yan wasn’t the slightest bit fearful. Chen Bo, you’re just a useless brat who’s barely capable of the simplest tasks. Do you really think you can stir up any trouble with me leading the team?

“You’re a Thief too! Why the hell are you making me go!?” Chen Bo coldly replied.

“I’m the team captain, so I have to lead the team. Would you rather have me scout ahead and have you lead the entire team instead, Brother Chen Bo?” Nie Yan countered.

“Hmph, no need! I want to see how exactly you plan to lead us through this dungeon on Specialist difficulty!” Chen Bo coldly snorted and walked to the front of the team. Utilizing his profession’s nimbleness, he then began scouting the path ahead.

From Chen Bo’s movements, Nie Yan could tell he was barely decent for an average Thief. If Chen Bo ever tried to compare with him, he would find that Nie Yan was of an entirely different caliber.

A cold breeze from the depths of the forest occasionally blew past, leaving the team with a strange sensation, almost as if they were being watched by some other entity. Nie Yan’s mind was on constant alert. With his keen sense, he caught glimpses of shadows hiding in the distance. They were Dark Elves, experts of camouflage and hiding in the darkness to mount ambushes. They were impossible to perceive unless the player had an Awareness of above ten.

Chen Bo moved forward and began scouting ahead for the rest of the team. On either side were thick branches with lush foliage which blocked his path. Beneath his feet were jungle vines and tree roots which resembled thick serpents as they lay strewn across the path ahead. They were tripping hazards and made advancing

forward quite difficult.

“Ugh! Damn these things to hell!” Chen Bo tried kicking away one of the vines lying on the path. However, it seemed to have a mind of its own. As if it were an actual snake, the vine coiled around his legs, whipped upwards, and left him dangling in midair with his head facing the ground. “Save me!” Chen Bo miserably shrieked.

The towering tree beside him suddenly came alive, whereupon vines stretched as far as the eye could see. Chen Bo saw the tree grow a pair of eyes, a nose, and a mouth. Even the vines surrounding the trunk grew into what seemed like a beard. Chen Bo had been caught off guard by a Treant!

“It’s a Treant! Bai Kaisui (Plain Boiled Water), Dumpling, attack from the right. Paladins, form a wall. Mages, start casting spells,” Nie Yan calmly ordered. He had actually noticed the Treant in disguise earlier when Chen Bo was scouting the area. However, he intentionally chose not to warn Chen Bo in order to give him a good lesson. You impolite brat, I’ll have this Treant teach you in my place.

Dumpling rushed forward from the right side as he held a wooden shield in his hand. “Shield Bash!” 「Bang!」A loud sound echoed out as the wooden shield collided with the Treant.

The crowd of frontliners firmly stood in place, surrounding the monster, while the Mages in the back fired off volley after volley of spells. A shower of magic flew up into the air and went streaking towards the Treant. 「Boom! Boom! Boom!」Several explosions rang

out in quick succession as they bombarded their target. The Treant issued a painful roar whereupon it transformed into a lump of wood debris that lay collapsed on the ground. The one they encountered was merely an ordinary mob. Therefore, it was impossible for the Treant to withstand such a concentrated assault.

The vine's grip on Chen Bo loosened and he was sent hurtling towards the ground.「Thud!」He fell flat on his face.

Seeing his sorry figure, everyone on the team couldn't help but laugh.

“What did it drop?”

“Three coppers.”

Chen Bo felt embarrassed. He cast an angry gaze at Nie Yan and said, “You did that intentionally, didn't you!?” He knew Nie Yan noticed the Treant earlier but still chose not to warn him. Otherwise, how could Nie Yan have reacted so calmly in such a sudden and urgent situation?

“Brother Morning Wood, you'll have to speak a bit more clearly. I'm finding your reasoning a little strange. It was you who wasn't careful and ended up getting caught by the Treant. What does that have to do with me?” Nie Yan gave a barely discernible smile as he gazed at Chen Bo, his expression telling otherwise. I did notice the Treant earlier, and I did intentionally not warn you. What can you do about it?

“You—”

“Chen Bo, stop causing trouble,” Yu Lan interrupted. She was also unclear about whether Nie Yan had noticed the Treant earlier or not.

“Peh! I guess it’s just my bad luck.” Chen Bo spit out some of the dirt in his mouth. He turned around and continued moving forward.

“Brother Morning Wood, take care of what you step on.” When Nie Yan spoke, he deliberately slowed down his speech as he watched Chen Bo accidentally step on a trap. The moment Chen Bo turned around to look at Nie Yan, a large wooden beam came swinging over and struck him in the stomach. Chen Bo was sent flying into the air.「Thud!」He once again fell flat on his face. Fortunately for him, Thieves had higher Reflex compared to other professions. Therefore, even if they stepped on a trap, they’d receive much less damage compared to other professions. Despite this, the trap had still taken more than half of Chen Bo’s health away. To add insult to injury, Nie Yan continued to taunt him. “I did tell you to be careful, yet unfortunately... you still didn’t listen to me. You’re playing the Thief profession. Don’t tell me you don’t know how to avoid traps? I really don’t know how you could act as the team’s Thief. A good Thief can increase a team’s survival rate by over fifty percent, but with a Thief like you—Ah, never mind. Forget it. I won’t say any more. I don’t want to hurt your pride or anything.”

It was already bad enough that he had fallen for another trap.

However, when Nie Yan deliberately taunted him in such a manner, Chen Bo looked as if he could spit fire as he stared daggers at Nie Yan.

Nie Yan didn't care in the least how Chen Bo stared at him. He wasn't some sort of kind and benevolent person. As soon as he entered their team, Chen Bo had always been mocking and ridiculing him. If he still continued to tolerate such behavior without acting, his name wouldn't be Nie Yan.

“Why are you still trying to show off if you're so unskilled? You got yourself in such a sorry state, and you're still trying to blame others?” Tang Yao added in a mocking and drawn-out tone.

“Your equipment's wasted on you. We'd probably find a better Thief than you by randomly pulling one off the streets.” Dusk also joined in while standing by Nie Yan's side. Chen Bo's current reputation within the team wasn't great. At the moment, no one was willing to speak out and help him.

“Nie Yan, you really didn't notice earlier?” Yao Yao's beautiful face was full of doubt. Chen Bo stepping into another trap right after being caught by the Treant did seem like more than just a coincidence. However, when she looked back on those incidents, it still seemed that it was his own fault for being inattentive.

“What does his carelessness have to do with me?” Nie Yan innocently replied.

“You're just full of evil tricks, aren't you? No one can tell

whether you purposefully baited him into those traps or not,” Yao Yao teasingly whispered into Nie Yan’s ear. The faint fragrance of her perfume paired with her soft and gentle voice left him feeling slightly refreshed.

“If I were Captain Yu Lan, I wouldn’t be so lenient in keeping such an unskilled Thief. I bet if I were to meet a hundred Thieves, ninety-nine of them wouldn’t be as weak as you. Do you want me to teach you how to play this profession?” The provocative tone in Nie Yan’s words was even clearer.

If the opposite party was determined to make an enemy out of him, he’d make sure to give them a few more kicks when he had them beneath his feet. Such was Nie Yan’s true character.

Nie Yan played with his dagger. His fingers were nimble as it twirled around his hand.

“My teammate lacks ability. Please just see this incident as nothing more than a joke. Chen Bo stepping in those traps while scouting ahead was due to his own carelessness.” As the team captain, Yu Lan also felt embarrassed when Chen Bo was ridiculed like so. Therefore she helped speak in his place.

“I guess it’s up to me then. It seems this task is something Brother Morning Wood is unable to accomplish,” Nie Yan announced. Since Yu Lan had spoken, it wouldn’t be quite appropriate for him to continue taunting Chen Bo. Besides, the only person he couldn’t bear was Chen Bo. He could get along fine with everyone else in Yu Lan’s team.

“I’ll have to trouble Brother Nie then,” Yu Lan replied. The change in topic eased the tension in the atmosphere.

Nie Yan rapidly inspected for traps as he scouted the path ahead. His eyes swept through the entire forest and he was extremely attentive as he examined every area where traps could potentially be placed. He noticed a peculiarly placed branch lying across the path ahead and instantly knew what it was upon examining it.

He extended his hand and lightly tapped the branch before quickly taking a few steps back.「Whoosh! Whoosh! Whoosh!」Several dozen arrows were set flying across his previous position.「Put! Put! Put!」A short moment later, all of the arrows could be seen embedded in a nearby tree.

He had long since ducked out of their path, so these arrows were unable to harm him in any way.

Nie Yan disarmed trap after trap as they travelled deeper into the forest. Yu Lan, Yao Yao, and Dusk could only see his figure continuously travelling back and forth between the trees. They were inwardly frightened by his astonishing efficiency in discovering and disarming traps. During this whole time, their team had never once stepped into another trap.

Disarming traps was a Thief’s responsibility because of the unique characteristics of the profession. Moreover, the profession also gained an additional bonus in the Reflex stat, which allowed them to have a fifty percent higher survival rate compared to other

professions.

Since Chen Bo was a Thief as well, he felt if he stayed idle with the rest of the team, he'd be losing too much face when compared to Nie Yan. With no other choice, he forced himself to look busy and traveled through the forest while pretending to look for traps. Only now did he realize the disparity between himself and Nie Yan. However, he was unwilling to admit it due to his pride. He inwardly sneered and muttered sourly, "He's only good at playing a video game. What's so amazing about that?"

Chapter 47 – Not All Men Are Created Equal

There were hidden dangers lurking everywhere within the forest such as the traps regularly encountered along the pathway. Chen Bo himself had narrowly escaped death by barely avoiding a fall into a spike pit. Fortunately, he was attentive enough to notice the pit before stepping in. Otherwise, he would have embarrassed himself further by dying to such a simple trap. After that incident, he changed his mind. He no longer went searching for traps along unexplored paths. Instead, he switched to areas Nie Yan had already scoured through and made himself look preoccupied, by pretending to search for any traps Nie Yan may have overlooked.

Even after ten minutes, no further mishaps occurred to Chen Bo; not because he was more attentive, but because every trap had already been disarmed in the areas he passed through.

Chen Bo pretended to examine a nearby area while he made his way over to a small clearing just ahead since he had just seen Nie Yan walk through it. As he arrived at the centre of the clearing, he noticed the ground beneath his feet was a little soft; however, he paid it no heed and negligently strode forward.

「Crash!」The ground trembled and a giant hole opened up underneath him, whereupon he fell into a pit of sludge. Chen Bo's entire body was covered in filth. Moreover, since this filth was a mix of toxic sludge and mud, he was inflicted with the poison status which caused him to lose two health per second. With a disgruntled expression, he raised his head to gauge how far of a distance he had fallen. The dirt walls surrounding him were roughly three meters in height. Since this pitfall was so deep, climbing out would require him to expend quite a bit of effort.

Having walked over to the pitfall, Nie Yan stuck his head over the hole and said, “Ah? Brother Chen Bo, how did you manage to fall into another trap? Didn’t I warn you earlier? As a Thief, you must always be wary of your surroundings. How could you just stride forward and step right into one again?”

“You bastard! I clearly saw you walking past this area without any problems! You intentionally set me up!” Chen Bo angrily cursed. He might be an idiot but he still managed to figure out what had happened.

“You stepped in there yourself. I never pushed you in, so how is it my fault? You were simply careless, that’s all. I also have another piece of advice for you: Just because I passed through an area safely, it doesn’t mean you will as well. Not all men are created equal.” Nie Yan gazed at Chen Bo disdainfully before shaking his head. “You’re too useless!” Even before he reincarnated into the past, Nie Yan had long understood what type of personality Chen Bo possessed: petty, vindictive, and unable to tolerate any kind of offense. If he held a grudge towards someone, he would simply carry out that grudge to the bitter end. Since this was the case, whatever schemes he had planned in his head, Nie Yan was ready to receive them all!

“Nie Yan, you son of a bitch, I’ll remember this! Fuck your ancestors down to the eighteenth generation! I’ll kick your ass if you’ve got the guts to fight me!” Chen Bo was foaming at the mouth with anger.

“You’d be useless in that aspect as well. Maybe you should bring a

few people with you too; otherwise, it'd be too boring.” Nie Yan was unfazed by Chen Bo’s outburst. He turned around and called out to Dumpling and his group. “Come pull him up. We still need to continue the run.”

As Dusk, Tang Yao, and the others glanced over, they felt Nie Yan had tormented Chen Bo into quite a miserable state.

「System: Player Chen Bo has withdrawn from the team.」

Chen Bo felt too embarrassed to stay any longer, so he gave himself an out by leaving the team.

“Good! Since that annoying fellow has left, let’s continue with the run. We’re better off without him anyway.” Nie Yan felt Chen Bo acted rather tactful by leaving when he knew he was unwelcome.

“Aren’t you going a little too far?” Yu Lan said while knitting her brows. Although she somewhat loathed Chen Bo as well, he was still a member of her team. She felt rather displeased when Nie Yan drove him away.

“You all saw what happened earlier as well. I wasn’t the one who had him foolishly walk into a slumbering Treant, nor was I the one who made him carelessly walk into traps. His actions were his own, and their consequences were due to his incompetence. I barely said more than a few sentences to him before he quit in a fit of anger. You really can’t blame those things on me, can you?” Nie Yan turned to face Yao Yao and innocently asked, “Am I in the

wrong here?”

Seeing Nie Yan’s appearance, Yao Yao was already on the verge of bursting into laughter. This guy had already got what he wanted, but he still wanted to act as if he was being wronged.

“Big Sister, Chen Bo’s attitude earlier was quite bad as well. Even if Nie Yan was a little excessive, all of the mishaps that occurred during this run really was due to Chen Bo’s own carelessness. Besides, he shouldn’t have been shirking off his own duties and pushing them onto Nie Yan.” Yao Yao didn’t have a favourable impression of Chen Bo either. Therefore, she spoke on Nie Yan’s behalf as soon as she opened her mouth.

“Ah, never mind. Let’s focus on the dungeon run first. We’ll discuss this after the run,” Yu Lan said, shaking her head.

“In any case, my cooperation with your team ends after this run. As long as Chen Bo remains on your team, even if you invite me to another run, I won’t come. As they say, what the eye doesn’t see, the heart won’t grieve over. Since these circumstances will never occur again, you no longer have a reason to get further upset. It will have nothing to do with your team even if he comes to me looking for trouble in the future,” Nie Yan added. Were it not for Yao Yao’s invitation, he would have never considered running a dungeon with Yu Lan’s team. Chen Bo was too much of an eyesore; so what if he drove him away? Even Buddha could be angered to some degree. He’d have been a weakling with no backbone if he let Chen Bo walk all over him like that.

“Nie Yan, I’m really sorry...” Yao Yao said apologetically. Nie Yan

had suffered because of her invitation.

Yao Yao really was too much of a sweetheart. This incident had been Chen Bo's fault, yet she still directed the blame towards herself.

"It isn't your fault. I'm just that sort of a person. If there's someone I'm not on good terms with, I'll keep looking for trouble. I've already gotten used to being a solo player and staying as one is fine too. If I enter a team, who knows what sort of restrictions they'll put on me. In the future, it'll be fine and dandy to just make my own team if I want to run a dungeon." Nie Yan laughed in a carefree manner.

He had played down the incident and skirted around the issue. From Yao Yao's perspective, Nie Yan appeared quite easy-going and unworried. Her impression of him somewhat changed once again.

"Right! After some time, we'll find our own people to make a team with!" Tang Yao enthusiastically added.

Nie Yan believed if he were going to invite people to create a team, at the very minimum, the members needed to be super experts if they wanted to join.

"If you guys make your own team, I'm afraid I can't join you," Yao Yao apologetically said. She was already in a fixed team. Although she loathed Chen Bo, Yu Lan was in the team as well. She would never betray Yu Lan to join another person's team, even if it

was Nie Yan's.

“Haha! Don't worry. I already know. Alright everyone, let's switch our focus back to the dungeon run. Let's not give Brother Chen Bo something to mock at by getting wiped during the run,” Nie Yan smiled and said.

“Brother Nie, well done,” Dusk said with a smile. He felt Nie Yan was quite an interesting person.

...

Deeper within the eerie forest near an opening between the trees, a community of Treants were sauntering around, blocking the path ahead. Nie Yan drew closer to these enemies and counted their numbers—eighteen Treants in total. They possessed thirty percent more health than their Normal difficulty counterparts and gained noticeable bonuses in stats as well. Furthermore, there was also Bind—a crowd control skill—and Lash—a skill that increased their damage—to be wary of. Their team could only handle three Treants at once. Any more, and things could get a little dangerous. If they were unlucky enough to encounter more than five at once, they were guaranteed to be wiped. Since the game was still new, most Priests still didn't have a healing or resurrection skill. In fact, the main purpose of coming to the Treant Forest for most teams was to get a hold of a Lesser Heal skill book.

“There's eighteen of them up ahead. I want you guys to stay where you are for now,” Nie Yan ordered. He examined the terrain of the nearby area and began to formulate a plan.

“There’s no way we can deal with so many Treants,” Yu Lan said. Frankly, the moment she found out they had entered this dungeon on Specialist difficulty, she had already begun feeling a little restless. If they were wiped again, several of their members were going to drop a level, and climbing back to their previous levels would take quite a long time.

“Don’t worry. I’m not stupid enough to have you guys deal with so many of them at once.” Nie Yan began gauging their distance. The nearest Treants were roughly ten meters away. He raised his head and surveyed the forest canopy. It was quite fortunate there was a tall tree right next to him, and there was a branch that could support a person. He could get a better vantage point from a higher elevation. As he extended his hand, he shot out a line of webbing from his Ring of Woven Silk, which adhered to the thick branch of the tree above. After making sure the line was secure, he nimbly scaled the tree.

“What is he going to do?” Yao Yao asked puzzledly as she looked to her side at Yu Lan and the others.

Chapter 48 – Godly Ability

“Brother Nie has impressive perception. He was actually able to find such a good vantage point!” Dusk exclaimed in admiration. He was much more knowledgeable compared to Yu Lan (Blue Feather), Bai Kaisui (Plain Boiled Water), and the others. Naturally, this was because he frequently followed his captain, Sleepy Fox, into difficult dungeons. How could he not be knowledgeable regarding dungeon specific techniques?

“Hey, tell us. What’s he planning to do?” Yu Lan asked. Although she held the position of team captain, she was only the captain of a run-of-the-mill team. Therefore, she and her team weren’t proficient in aspects such as dungeoneering, otherwise, they wouldn’t have been wiped out in this dungeon on Easy difficulty.

“When running dungeons, there’s always one person assigned a certain designated task. That task is to find a suitable position to attack certain monsters within a large group. Optimally, that person should aggro one or two monsters over to the team without alerting the other monsters in the group. Using such methods, teams can break down large crowds of mobs into more manageable sizes. Generally, this job is assigned to the Thief who uses a crossbow to carry it out. Presumably, you should all know these things by now. Those eighteen Treants just ahead are quite close to each other. The moment one of them is aggroed, many others will follow in tow. This difference in mob density is likely also one of the key differences in running a Specialist dungeon. Even the minor obstacles are this difficult to deal with. Earlier, I had surveyed the area but was unable to find a suitable position to start. It wasn’t until I saw Brother Nie Yan scale the tree that I realised I was mistaken in my judgement. His current location is the most optimal for luring mobs. If one didn’t have exceptional

perception, they would be hard-pressed to find such a great spot! If we had such a Thief in our team, our survival rate would increase by at least thirty percent or higher,” Dusk explained. He was not in the least bit shy in expressing his praise and admiration for Nie Yan’s skills.

Yu Lan remained taciturn. Initially, she believed herself quite capable, for being able to properly manage a team. However, it appeared that notion was simply due to her lack of experience.

When Yao Yao gazed at Nie Yan standing at the top of the branch, her eyes shone with a peculiar splendour. Nie Yan’s position within her mind had once again been elevated a few steps. Other than her senior sister, Yu Lan, there was no other person she admired more.

“However, finding a suitable position is one thing... actually luring the monsters without attracting the rest of the group is another. The latter is a test of a Thief’s perception and reaction. If he’s even a little off in the timing or hitting of his target, worst case scenario, he’ll aggro the whole group towards us and cause us to be wiped. Even the most elite Thieves have lapses in judgement and make mistakes,” Dusk gazed at Nie Yan and said in a nervous tone.

While standing on top of the branch, Nie Yan sheathed his dagger and wore it on his waist. He promptly retrieved his crossbow from his bag and propped it up on his shoulder. As he observed the Treants’ movements through the sight, his forehead dripped with a bead of sweat. The pressure and nervousness in his mind reached its apex. At this moment, the lives of all nineteen members of his

team would be decided by his hands!

As the tension in the atmosphere increased, Nie Yan gradually tuned out the distractions around him until what remained was only the crossbow in his hand and the target through his sight.

Even after the seconds ticked into minutes he patiently awaited his opportunity to strike.

Most of these Treants stood idle. Occasionally, one or two of them would uproot themselves and roam about. However, they consistently remained within two meters of each other. The close proximity put him in an extremely risky situation. A single badly timed shot could cause a chain of aggro that would lead the entire group to his team.

Below Nie Yan were eighteen other players watching his every movement attentively. Earlier, they had been ignorant of the severity of their situation. It wasn't until Dusk's explanation that they realised their lives were held in Nie Yan's hands. Since this dungeon was a sealed space, they would have nowhere to run to if those Treants came lumbering over after discovering their presence.

With the cross propped on his shoulder, Nie Yan remained motionless atop the tree branch almost as if he were a statue.

Time seemed to have stood still.

Through the crossbow sight, Nie Yan's eyes focused on several Treants in the distance.

Periodically, a gust of wind blew past the trees causing the leaves to fall and flutter as if they were butterflies.

Nie Yan glanced at the fallen leaves floating in the wind. Wind speed, medium...

He abruptly pulled the trigger. The crossbow recoiled acutely after the first bolt fired. Before the second bolt flew out, he sharply shifted the crossbow in another direction.「Woosh! Woosh! Woosh!」Three bolts fired from the crossbow. As these bolts flew through the air, they surprisingly weren't shot out in a single line but in three separate directions.

“We're done for... Brother Nie's hands were unsteady when he fired!” Dusk called out in alarm. When firing a crossbow, the user shouldn't be nervous and absolutely shouldn't have shaky hands. Otherwise, a single slip-up could cost the lives of the entire team.

No matter what profession, the shooter must first have a calm and steady mind because a single shot could decide the fate of their comrades. Under this kind of intense mental pressure, even an experienced expert could have a lapse in judgement due to nervousness. Consequently, such a lapse in judgement was the guaranteed deaths of the entire team.

It seems Brother Nie couldn't handle the pressure...

Every member of the team felt their hearts sink upon hearing Dusk's words.

“Bai Kaisui, prepare to hold position [289.288.212]!” After firing the crossbow, Nie Yan didn't bother watching to see if the three bolts were on target. He leapt off the tree branch onto the ground and began running towards the team.

Dusk and the rest of the team looked over in the area where the bolts were fired.「Put! Put! Put!」The first bolt passed in between the Treants and struck a tree further in the back while the second bolt struck a sapling in the west. Despite both bolts missing their supposed targets, the noise from the bolts striking bark alerted the nearby Treants and over ten of them moved towards the two points to investigate the sources of the noise.

The remaining bolt struck the Treant nearest to the team and alerted a companion as well, whereupon the two Treants began lumbering over to Nie Yan.

These two Treants quickly separated from their group as they chased Nie Yan from behind.

He managed to lure two of them without aggroing the others!

“Holy shit, that was amazing!” Dusk exclaimed in surprise. The others might have not clearly seen what had happened but how could he not? The crossbow in Nie Yan's hand was a type of semi-automatic crossbow that fired in three-bolt bursts. The three bolts were fired in different directions. The first two bolts had drawn

most of the Treants away while the last bolt drew two Treants towards the team. He had been mistaken earlier in believing Nie Yan had unsteady hands when firing the crossbow. Rather, it was actually Nie Yan quickly changing directions to fire at different targets! He had only heard about this kind of highly-advanced skill in rumours!

Even with the same crossbow, if it were another person firing, the outcome would likely be vastly different!

Dusk had been secretly recording during this entire run. Although this type of video couldn't be publically viewed online if it was recorded without the consent of the person in the video, it could still be shared privately with friends. He would definitely show this clip to his captain, Sleepy Fox.

A true top-class Thief!

This method of drawing aggro was an innovation in dungeoneering! If publically disseminated, it would certainly become textbook among Thieves!

Two Treants were nothing difficult. Since Bai Kaisui had already gotten into position, he easily intercepted one of the incoming Treants while Nie Yan used Concussive Blow on its companion. The rest of the frontliners arrived to surround the Treants and the Mages began casting their magic.「Boom! Boom! Boom!」A rain of spells exploded over the Treant's bodies.

One of the Treants swept its arm out repelling most of the

frontliners away. However, Bai Kaisui held his position, refusing to retreat. He loudly roared and struck the Treant using Shield Bash.

“The key to being a successful Fighter isn’t necessarily the ability to be aggressive. It’s the ability to be firm and stable. It doesn’t matter what situation, you mustn’t create any openings that could lead to a break in the ranks,” Nie Yan frankly advised, after seeing Bai Kaisui’s action. Although Nie Yan believed Bai Kaisui was a decent player, he was still far from being an expert in Nie Yan’s eyes.

In reality, before he reincarnated, those who were stronger than him could be found everywhere. It was just that everyone, in the present, was simply new to the game. The players were still gradually familiarising themselves with the combat and different skills and techniques in the game. However, Nie Yan was different. He had over ten years of experience in the game as a Thief and was already quite familiar with the various aspects of the game. The saying goes, “Practice makes perfect,” and Nie Yan, with his ten years of gameplay knowledge, had already far exceeded any current player in the game. The techniques he used now that would cause others to exclaim in admiration would be standard ten years later. There were still a few genuinely difficult techniques that even he wasn’t able to grasp. Those were the true highly-advanced techniques!

Bai Kaisui tuned down his aggression after listening to Nie Yan’s advice. When they first met, he wasn’t particularly impressed with Nie Yan’s ability. However, after witnessing Nie Yan’s display of skill just a moment ago, he became thoroughly convinced even if he wasn’t able to see it clearly. Since Nie Yan was elevated to the status of super expert in his mind, he would firmly believe in any

advice that he was given by Nie Yan.

After focusing more on defense, even though the Treant's attacks were fierce, he found it easier to hold his ground. He stood more stably and the pressure he felt had immediately lessened.

Chapter 49 – Insane Levelling Speed

After all was said and done, Nie Yan had knowledge of the next ten years of gameplay, events, and updates. Just a few words from him to Bai Kaisui (Plain Boiled Water) would allow the latter to reap endless benefits.

Another wave of spells struck the Treants. After the third wave, the first Treant collapsed and exploded into a pile of wood debris. Ten seconds later, the second Treant collapsed as well.

Nie Yan walked over their corpses and rummaged through the wood pile. He found a few coppers and a pair of Bronze-grade Mage gloves with Focus +2.

“A pair of Mage gloves dropped. Decide who should have it among yourselves,” Nie Yan said and threw the gloves over to Yu Lan (Blue Feather).

Naturally, Tang Yao and Dusk declined as they had no use for such gloves. Even though the Bronze-grade gloves were decent, it was still inferior to their set equipment.

In the end, the player named Pirate had the winning bid and received the pair of gloves for twelve copper. The money from his bid was then evenly split among the other team members. In this fashion, players could obtain equipment inexpensively rather than paying higher prices in the marketplace.

“Nie Yan, that move earlier was [amazing](#)! How did you pull it off?

You should teach me next time!” Yao Yao (Dark Mystery) exclaimed excitedly, since crossbow techniques similarly applied to magic as well. She was considered an expert amongst her friends but in reality, she felt there was quite a large gap between herself and the true experts like Nie Yan.

Nie Yan replied with a faint smile and said, “Sure. Actually, it’s not really that difficult. I’ll tell you later when we get out of the dungeon.” After he finished speaking, he walked back to his prior position so they could continue the run. Nie Yan lured the Treants over one after the other. Sometimes, only one lumbered over; other times, they brought one or two companions with them. However, there were never more than three Treants at once. Since they ran the dungeon on Specialist difficulty, the drop rate was increased by over five hundred percent. Moreover, the type of equipment dropped was of a much higher quality. When all eighteen Treants were killed, the team obtained two more pieces of Bronze-grade equipment with decent properties and one piece of Silver-grade equipment.

When Yu Lan and her team ran this dungeon on Easy, they obtained no more than five pieces of Bronze-grade equipment per run. The properties of the equipment they picked up weren’t spectacular either. Yet, at present, the value of their recently dropped equipment far surpassed the profits of an entire run for them on Easy. Moreover, this was still the beginning of the dungeon! Such a fact put the members of the team in higher spirits.

“The profits from running a Specialist dungeon are staggering!” Dusk exclaimed. He felt the current drop rate was unimaginable.

“This is only the beginning,” Nie Yan replied. From his experience, these profits were simply a drop in the bucket. The total amount earned in a Specialist run was much more.

“The path splits up ahead,” Dusk called out. Everyone cast their gaze forward. The path between the forest thickets forked into two different directions.

“We’ll head west,” Nie Yan replied.

“Aren’t we supposed to go east?” Dusk asked in surprise. He and Sleepy Fox always went east when running this dungeon because the path to the west was a dead end. Regardless of the selected difficulty, the map for the Treant Forest always stayed the same.

“You won’t go wrong by listening to my instructions. While it’s true the west path leads to a dead end, don’t you think it’s odd for the path to exist for no reason? In fact, that area actually contains something very special! However, we’ll have to be a little more cautious. Many Treants lurk on the path ahead, making it quite dangerous,” Nie Yan replied. The secret to the dead end was hidden quite deeply. Very few people were able to discover it. If it weren’t for the information from his past life, he might have missed out on a great opportunity.

Everyone followed Nie Yan and took the west path. While on the path, they encountered many Treants roaming around. Sometimes, the Treants even charged towards the team. However, thanks to Nie Yan’s reminders, they were able to prepare in advance.

“Smothering Strike!” Nie Yan struck a Treant from behind and stunned it. He then turned around to attack another one nearby.

Bai Kaisui and the rest of the frontliners rushed up to take aggro while the Mages followed in tow.「Boom! Boom! Boom!」A volley of spells bombarded the two Treants.

...

The two Treants finally collapsed to the ground.

From their corpses, they found three coppers and a single skill book.

Skill Book: [Uncanny Dodge](#) (Passive)

Skill Description: Increases the player’s senses and ability to evade attacks.

Skill Attribute: Evasion +2, Awareness +1

User Restriction: Thief, Warrior, Paladin; can be learned by any faction.

“Since it’s a skill book I can learn, I’ll be taking it,” Nie Yan said to the team. The skill book was quite rare. Even its drop rate on Specialist was very low.

The skill could be learned by Thieves, Warriors, and Paladins. If he were to put it up for auction, it could sell for at least two silvers.

Furthermore, at present, it was a skill book that had yet to appear on the marketplace. If such a skill book appeared in a run beside theirs, that team's members would certainly fight or even become enemies over it.

However, Nie Yan directly took it without any opposition. Although many members drooled over the skill book, no one dared to say anything since they had already accepted Nie Yan's conditions before setting out. Besides, without him, let alone obtaining such a good item, they wouldn't even be able to take one step forward in this Specialist dungeon.

Each profession had a maximum of fifty skill slots. For an average Thief to fill even twenty-five of those slots was an accomplishment. Most players were able to comfortably get by with around ten active skills. Players able to attain more than twenty active skills were in the top ranks among the player base. Therefore, the majority of players had their skill bars padded with passive skills.

Some skills could be improved as time went on; however, those were few and far between. The bulk of skills obtained by players generally couldn't be improved. Skills could also be forgotten to free up space in the skill bar. Therefore, once some lower level skills outlived their use, they could be replaced with higher level ones.

Uncanny Dodge was classified as one of the skills that couldn't be improved.

Nie Yan glanced at his character page after learning the skill. His

Evasion and Awareness had increased. The stat bonuses from passive skills were permanent. He felt passive skills were much better because the stat bonuses from equipment would disappear once the gear was unequipped.

...

The team had walked half-way through the path—just enough to see the edge of the forest. They could hear the gentle melody of a flute as the sound drifted between the leaves and floated into their ears. The clear melody moved the hearts of the members in the team.

“There’s a delirious old man who speaks nothing but gibberish at the end of the forest. No matter how we inquired or interacted with him, he wouldn’t give us any sort of quest. Since we could beat the Treant King regardless and the old man didn’t seem to do anything, we figured he was just a useless NPC. Don’t tell me he’s actually part of a quest line or something?” Dusk asked and turned to face Nie Yan. He didn’t know whether Nie Yan had any thoughts on this old man.

“There’s never an NPC who appears in a dungeon without reason. They have a ninety percent chance of being related to the main storyline,” Nie Yan replied before continuing on the path.

Dusk looked on in confusion. Could Nie Yan have found some clues regarding this old man? In any case, he feared this attempt would be futile as well.

Nie Yan had read over detailed guides for every dungeon in the game. Moreover, he himself had personally experienced ninety-nine percent of these dungeons. The matter of the senile old man was an easy case for him to solve.

“Nie Yan, have you been through this dungeon before?” Yao Yao asked. She was quite curious. Why did he seem to know everything about this dungeon?

“I’ve run this dungeon with a team before,” Nie Yan replied with a nod.

“On Specialist as well?”

“Nope, only on Normal difficulty.”

“Why were you so confident in entering the dungeon on Specialist then?”

“Like I said before, Specialist isn’t actually that hard. You simply need to have enough skill and if you understand the dungeon well enough, passing it on Specialist won’t be difficult at all,” Nie Yan replied.

When Nie Yan spoke in a confident and certain tone, it almost seemed as if every matter that appeared before him could be easily resolved. Yao Yao quietly gazed at Nie Yan. The outline of his face, as well as his overall appearance, still looked somewhat childish; a little bit of stubble had barely grown out of his chin. He wasn’t

particularly handsome but he had a peculiar personality that made her subconsciously feel she could trust and rely on him.

As Yao Yao stared longer than what was considered polite, a thought suddenly emerged into her mind and she quickly turned away. A faint tinge of red could be seen on her elegant face.

“Yao Yao, how did you meet him again?” Yu Lan asked as she stood right beside Yao Yao. She also became quite interested in Nie Yan. The game servers had barely opened a week ago, so such a strong player was a rare sight.

“Remember when I was killing Water Spiders in Lake Rando? He was the one who saved me that day. If it weren’t for him, I’m afraid I would be a level lower right now,” Yao Yao replied. She shuddered at the thought of losing one level. Actually, she didn’t know how she got into such a mess in the first place but she had found herself being surrounded by six Water Spiders. She managed to kill three of them after using up two scrolls and a Basic Health Potion. However, the remaining three nearly ended her life.

Yu Lan couldn’t help thinking Yao Yao was extremely lucky to have met Nie Yan back then. Even if you searched every nook and cranny, you wouldn’t necessarily find someone as skilled as him.

...

Along the path, the team had killed another Treant and a jingling sound rang out. A white light then surrounded Nie Yan’s body.

“I levelled up,” Nie Yan said and glanced at his character page. He had finally reached Level 4.

“Congratulations.”

“Congratulations,” the team members applauded one after the other.

“Nie Yan, you levelled up already? How are you so quick!?” Tang Yao exclaimed in surprise. Just yesterday, he was almost fifty percent ahead of Nie Yan in experience! How did Nie Yan suddenly get so far ahead of him in only one day!?

Chapter 50 – Treant Caretaker

“I handed in a quest before I got off last night. It gave some fairly decent experience, so my level rose by quite a bit.”

“What kind of quest gives so much experience at once? Tell me, where is it? I want to try it too!”

“It was a unique quest.”

“Ah, so it was a unique quest. Oh well, forget it then,” Tang Yao replied in a disappointed manner. Unique quests were generally quite hard to trigger. Though their difficulties varied, the rewards for these quests were always extremely generous.

“Nie Yan, you’re already Level 4?” Yao Yao exclaimed in shock. Nie Yan was only Level 2 when she first encountered him, yet he reached Level 4 after only two days? Wasn’t this levelling speed a bit too monstrous?

“Mhmm.” Nie Yan nodded.

Even more shocked to hear this news was Dusk. He had heard from Flying Stone three days prior that Nie Yan had only been Level 0 when they first met. Barely several days have passed and he’s already Level 4. No wonder he dared to start all over again... It’s because he had the confidence to rise up. That’s why he dared to delete his old Warrior character!

This guy is impressive! And not the average kind of impressive either! Dusk said to himself.

Several days ago, Nie Yan didn't put much thought into his explanation for Stone. He made up a story by telling Stone he simply deleted his old account and was restarting. After all, it was an easy explanation for why he knew so much about the dungeons.

Finally... Level 4. Nie Yan glanced at his experience bar. Currently, the highest level player in the game had only reached Level 6. Even groups like Sleepy Fox and his team averaged around Level 5. If he kept going at his current pace, he was certain to overtake them; it was only a matter of time.

As the team neared the edge of the forest, the members could see a distant cliff face ahead. Trees, shrubs, and flowers, along with other various plants flourished and grew vigorously on its near vertical incline. Presumably, this steep rock face was the end of the west path.

In addition to the cliff face, the team caught sight of a lone NPC at the edge of the forest—an elderly man in a shabby looking cap. He sat beside a nearby tree with his back supported by the trunk, absorbed in playing the flute he held in his hands. The song was dreary and distant, as if its melody had drifted through the forest since antiquity.

Nie Yan examined the old man. The name displayed above his head read “Nameless Old Man,” but Nie Yan knew this NPC's actual name: Einpat the Treant Caretaker. He was this forest's protector. Under his supervision, humans and Treants coexisted

peacefully. However, around a month ago, the Treants suddenly went out of control and began slaughtering any humans that entered the forest. When traces of Dark Elf activity were discovered in the area, the Viridian Empire's council of elders issued a statement. They called for the brave adventurers of the empire to enter the forest and kill the most dangerous being inside—the Treant King. This was where the main storyline of the Treant Forest dungeon begun.

“Adventurers, you have travelled a long way but please turn back now. This area is very dangerous. The Treants will kill anyone who enters the forest, so please hurriedly depart. When night descends, beneath the light of the moon, they gain a strange demonic power that increases their strength immensely.” The Nameless Old Man stopped playing his flute upon seeing Nie Yan approach and advised him to turn back.

“Respected Caretaker Einpat, it's an honour to grace your presence. We've come here in order to exterminate the evil Treant King. While these Treants have gone berserk, it is my hope that God will allow them to be saved,” Nie Yan replied in a sincere and righteous manner.

“Damn those wretched beings from the underground! They should receive divine judgement! They stole my flute and hid it somewhere while snickering in the shadows!” Caretaker Einpat furiously exclaimed.

「This! Right here! It's clearly a prompt for a quest but this old guy never gave it to us. No matter how we talked to him after, the old coot would only tell us to hurriedly leave. After that, we didn't

bother with him anymore and went straight to killing the Treant King,」 Dusk said in the team chat.

「That's because you guys ran this dungeon on Hard difficulty. If we don't trigger this NPC's dialogue in Specialist difficulty, we'd have no way to beat the Treant King. The boss on Specialist is much more difficult than its counterpart on Hard,」Nie Yan replied. He then glanced at the shadows in the distance before turning his head and continuing his conversation with Einpat. “It is them. I immediately discovered their presence the moment I entered the forest. May the radiance of light purify these wretched demons.”

“Adventurer, you can actually detect their presence? Good! If not for those two damned Dark Elves snatching my flute, the Treants wouldn't have gone berserk. Here, I personally created this Disillusioning Powder. It can reveal their true appearances and prevent them from escaping into the shadows again. Please, kill them and retrieve my flute, then you'll be able to defeat the Treant King.” Caretaker Einpat rejoiced in surprise.

「System: You've obtained Disillusioning Powder. Quantity: 3」

Disillusioning Powder: Reveals all hidden players and monsters within a thirty meter radius for twenty seconds.

After receiving the powder, Nie Yan glanced at the distant shadows once more. Along with [Transcendent Insight](#), his Awareness far exceeded other Thieves of the same level. Therefore, he was able to keenly sense the malicious entities stalking the shadows ever since he and his team entered the dungeon.

Out of everyone in the team, only Nie Yan had managed to notice the presence of those two Dark Elves.

“You... received the quest?” Dusk asked blankly. Prior to this, he, Sleepy Fox, and their team had tried numerous methods but were unable to retrieve even a single clue from this old man. He never expected it would be so simple to receive the quest while under Nie Yan’s lead.

“Yeah, let’s keep moving. We’ve still got a lot of work to do,” Nie Yan replied.

“Really? Was there really something following us?” Yao Yao followed Nie Yan’s gaze. Besides the shadows, there was absolutely nothing there. She suddenly felt a deep chill run down her spine.

“Just a bunch of frail Dark Elves. There’s nothing to worry about.”

Nie Yan then began strutting towards [the darker areas in the forest](#).

With eighteen others following from behind, Nie Yan led the team out of the opening where the elderly NPC resided. He took them through a long and narrow path between the trees and brought them to the cliff face. At the base of the cliff, everyone could see a dense blanket of green covering the entire rock face where all sorts of vegetation grew.

“Why did we come here?” Tang Yao asked.

It wasn't just Tang Yao, everyone else also felt puzzled as to why Nie Yan led them here.

Nie Yan glanced upward at the cliff face above them and said, “We came here to look for an opportunity to catch those two Dark Elves... Hold on, I think I saw something over on that side.” Nie Yan walked alongside the wall and jumped. He leapt three meters into the air before clinging onto the vegetation on the cliff face. He then shot a web line at a shrub three meters above him. Resembling a nimble monkey, he climbed higher and higher by grabbing onto nearby protruding rocks.

“Guys, look over there!” Yao Yao pointed above.

Everyone looked in the direction Yao Yao pointed. Only then did they discover a faintly shimmering object slightly sticking out on the cliff face. From its appearance, it was likely a treasure chest and a silver one at that. There was actually a chest so well hidden in this area. If it weren't for Nie Yan, they would have never discovered it!

The real reason Nie Yan brought everyone here was solely for the sake of this chest as it only appeared in the Specialist version of this dungeon. Thus, in order not to arouse the team's suspicions, he acted as if he were looking for the Dark Elves.

Nie Yan reached over and found the chest embedded deeply

inside the crack on the cliff face. He didn't know who discovered this chest first, but the person who discovered it was surely an expert. After all, it was nearly impossible to notice such a well-hidden chest unless the player possessed exceptional observational ability. Even without his exceptional eyesight, this location could be found on the guides in his past life. Be it hidden chests, items, or information regarding their respective dungeons, they were all written down. The knowledge came from the experiences of the high-level experts before him. When these experts reached a higher level, they would write down this information and sell it to online publications for a hefty sum. Nie Yan had always looked at these guides and thoroughly researched them before actually entering a dungeon with a team. This aided him greatly in avoiding disastrous mistakes and taking the wrong paths.

Chapter 51 – Elves

This chest wasn't locked so Nie Yan stretched out his arm and opened it.

「System: Opening chest... Estimated Completion: 37%... 53%...」

「Click!」The treasure chest's lid popped open. Nie Yan reached in and dug around. For the most part, items found inside dungeon chests were generated randomly, so anything could appear. Now it was all just a matter of luck.

After digging around for what seemed like half a day, Nie Yan picked up a skill book and a necklace from the chest.

Ah! It's an accessory. Guess my luck isn't too bad. Nie Yan felt pleasantly surprised. Accessories such as rings, necklaces, and medallions were the rarest type of equipment players could receive. Since they were so difficult to find, they fetched a high price on the marketplace and most players could only leave their accessory slots empty.

Forest Necklace

Properties: Unidentified

Nie Yan appraised the item using Transcendent Insight.

Forest Necklace (Silver)

Level Requirement: 0

Properties: Defense 2–3, Dexterity +2, Awareness +1

Weight: 1 lb

User Restriction: None

What a good accessory! It's a Silver-tier necklace! Nie Yan felt quite elated. He then turned to look at the skill book. It's a Lesser Heal skill book! The Lesser Heal skill was the lowest level healing skill of the Priest profession. However, it was difficult to acquire since its skill book could only be found within dungeons. This was also one of the reasons its market price remained so high, to the extent it was even more valuable than some Silver-tier equipment. Having received the Forest Necklace, Nie Yan didn't mind too much about losing the Lesser Heal skill book. If he were to place it up for auction, he'd only receive around three silver. Such an insignificant sum wasn't worth batting his eye over.

Nie Yan descended the cliff and met up with the team.

“We're pretty lucky. The chest dropped a necklace and a Lesser Heal skill book. You guys can have the skill book since I don't need it, but I'll be taking the necklace,” Nie Yan said. He didn't have to pay a single cent when taking an item. On the other hand, Yu Lan

(Blue Feather) and her team had to share their profits with Dusk and Tang Yao. After all, the two were invited here and couldn't just leave empty-handed.

“It's a Silver-grade necklace!” Bai Kaisui's (Plain Boiled Water) and the others' eyes practically fell out of their sockets. A Silver-grade necklace! Now just how much was that worth? The group watched in anguish as Nie Yan put the necklace away. Ah, it's such a pity... Why does it have to belong to someone else?

“If it weren't for him finding this chest, we would've never gotten this Lesser Heal skill book in the first place. It would be better if we just buy this skill book off of you, Brother Nie,” Yu Lan said. She wasn't willing to take advantage of Nie Yan's generosity. The skill book was brought back by his own efforts. They hadn't done anything to help at all.

“Since you put it that way... I'll be straightforward and sell it to you. The market price for a Lesser Heal skill book is around three silvers, possibly even more. However, I'll lower the price and sell it to you for cheaper—two silvers! How does that sound? This price can't be considered disadvantageous to you, right?” Nie Yan replied. He wasn't the least bit reserved in agreeing to Yu Lan's request.

“Couldn't you have just politely declined instead?” Yao Yao interjected, stamping her feet.

Nie Yan calmly laughed and replied, “Since someone is so adamant about spending their money, why should I refuse? Only fools would refuse money. If you want this Lesser Heal skill book, I

can give it to you. Even if you wanted ten of them, I would still help you find them. However, your captain wants to buy it instead because she doesn't want to owe me any favours. Let's say I disregard her sentiments and politely refuse her offer... Even if you wouldn't mind me being a hypocrite, I'd still be despising myself for being one."

"Our team funds are only around five silvers... Would it be possible to pay you the two silvers at a later date?" Yu Lan asked in slight embarrassment. If she paid the two silvers now, their funds would be even more lacking than they were now.

"Are your funds that lacking? You even need to owe someone two silvers? Ah, whatever, whatever! You can pay me back whenever you want," Nie Yan replied and waved his hands. An entire team couldn't even bring out two silvers... Although that appeared quite pathetic, most teams only had two silvers! In reality, Yu Lan and her team were quite well off. They were just naturally no match when paired up against a walking money bag like Nie Yan.

The entire team stared at Nie Yan. These were two silvers! It wasn't paltry amount! Yet he still didn't attach any importance to them. This man was truly rich and overbearing.

Yao Yao pulled at Nie Yan's sleeves and gazed at him while blinking her innocent eyes. She asked in a harmless and sincere tone, "Nie Yan... would you really be willing to gift me ten skill books?"

"Uh... Sure, but you never told me where I could find those ten skill books to give you." Nie Yan felt a cold sweat run down his

forehead. He knew exactly what sort of wicked thoughts were running through this enchantress' mind.

“Hmph. You don't even have the least bit of sincerity,” Yao Yao replied and feigned anger. Nevertheless, the corners of her mouth curved into a smile. Of course, she would never actually ask Nie Yan to give her ten Lesser Heal skill books. She only wanted to tease him a bit, that's all.

Tang Yao glanced at the overhanging cliff. He was actually able to spot that chest all the way over there? He was increasingly unable to make sense of Nie Yan. The changes in this childhood friend of his became even greater and greater, to the point where even he was having slight troubles recognizing him. However, one thing remained certain. No matter how much Nie Yan changed, he would always remain as his brother!

“Alright, let's focus on the matter at hand. We're going to have to kill those two Dark Elves that have been stalking from behind. There's a ravine in the area. We'll split up into two groups. I'll lead the first group into the ravine while the second group trails us. Those two Dark Elves are quite crafty, so we'll have to lure them into the ravine and trap them in there by blocking their exit. Afterward, we'll use the Disillusioning Powder to reveal them. However, I want everyone to stay on full alert. Even though those two Dark Elves don't possess much fighting strength, they make up for it with their speed. We have to make sure they don't escape; otherwise, it'll be very difficult to make them fall for the same trick twice,” Nie Yan ordered and began carrying out his strategy.

The team separated into two groups. The first group of ten

remained on standby while the second group advanced into the ravine.

While moving forward, Nie Yan paid careful attention to his surroundings. He noticed the slight movement of a silhouette eleven meters ahead. The other one didn't follow? Nie Yan questioned inwardly. However, he was then able to sense something following them from behind. The entity kept ten meters of distance between them.

They're both here. Nie Yan's lips curved into a faint smile. These two elves are quite cowardly, afraid to even separate from themselves. Good, we'll wipe them both out at once.

Nie Yan and the group entered the ravine. On either side of them were towering walls of rocks around ten meters high. In between was a small trail that was able to fit five or six players walking side by side.

This narrow ravine was the perfect site to set up an ambush. However, they had to succeed on the first try. Those two crafty elves wouldn't be easily fooled twice.

Nie Yan sensed the two elves were hesitating at the entrance of the ravine. After a brief moment, they entered and followed.

They took the bait. Good, now they're trapped just like a turtle in a jar! Nie Yan inwardly rejoiced. He then ordered through the team chat,「Yu Lan, you guys can come over now. Block the ravine's entrance and by all means, don't let those crafty buggers escape!」

Yu Lan felt strange and somewhat uncomfortable when Nie Yan addressed her without any honorifics, but this wasn't the time to bother with such a matter. She led the remaining team members and rushed over to the ravine.

「We're here!」Yu Lan informed.

Nie Yan retrieved the Disillusioning Powder and threw it in the air, whereupon the powder scattered and floated across the ravine. The powder's area of effect constantly expanded and eventually covered the entire ravine. When the powder landed on the nearby shadows, the figures of the two impish elves were gradually revealed.

With pointed ears, their emaciated figures were nearly all skin and bone while the colour of their skin was a dark ashy grey. Besides their physical feature, the clothing on their body was shabby and worn out.

While the High Elves in the game were beautiful and handsome, these two Dark Elves were so shamefully ugly it was no wonder they were always hidden.

“RRYyeeKGgthh!” One of the elves let out an ear-piercing screech.

Chapter 52 – Einpat's Flute

Both elves turned their backs and frantically dashed towards the ravine's exit. Like a pair of hares, their movements were quite nimble. Nonetheless, they were quite fragile as well and only had around a hundred health. A single round of spells was enough to kill them instantly.

"You want to run? In your dreams!" As if he were an arrow released from a bow, Nie Yan quickly shot out from behind.

The rest of the group trailed him and followed in pursuit.

Right now, Yu Lan's group should've already blocked off the exit.

Before the two elves made it too far, they were immediately stopped in their tracks upon reaching the ravine's passage. Sure enough, Yu Lan and her group had already arrived and firmly stood in place, blocking off the elves' only path to freedom.

They were already trapped with no hope of escape!

The two elves quickly glanced at each other before dashing towards the cliff face. When they had scaled three meters of the cliff, Nie Yan arrived right behind them and suddenly leaped into the air. He reached out with his arm and managed to grab one of the elves by the leg. He then extended his left hand and shot out a line of webbing from his Ring of Woven Silk. As the web line wrapped itself around the other elf's leg, he pulled back sharply and flung the two elves off the cliff face. 「Crash!」 Their bodies made

heavy contact with the ground, causing a cloud of dust to form and rise in the air.

With Nie Yan's Dexterity and jump range being so high, his range of movements and speed were astonishing to a frightening degree. These two Dark Elves simply weren't his match.

Shortly after the rest of the team arrived and surrounded the two elves, the Mages raised their staffs and prepared to unleash a rain of spells.

"Ryeehgh... Ryeghkh..." The two elves revealed pleading expressions on their faces.

"Hold up! Don't kill them for now." Nie Yan's heart jumped in excitement. In his previous life, the player only needed to kill these two elves and Einpat's flute would drop. When they handed the flute back to Einpat, they could proceed with the dungeon. However, he had never come across a situation such as this, where the elves wouldn't fight back and instead pleaded for their lives.

In his previous life, the highest completion rate attained for this dungeon was only around seventy-five percent. Even ten years into the game, no one beat the dungeon to full completion. Yet at present, he couldn't say for sure these two elves wouldn't lead him to any information regarding the missing twenty-five percent.

When he was Level 4 in his previous life, the stats of his game character simply couldn't compare with his stats right now. At that time, he was only an average low-level player, unable to

obtain even a simple set of Bronze-grade equipment for himself. There was no need to even mention ludicrous aspirations such as attaining the legendary Chapter of Courage. In short, the Dexterity and jump range of his previous character were too inadequate. Let alone capturing these Dark Elves, even overtaking them was impossible. Therefore every team at the time—including his own—could only blast them with magic when they attempted to scale the ravine's walls.

With their two bodies curled up like potato bugs, the two elves knelt on the ground and gazed at Nie Yan with begging expressions in the hopes that he would spare their lives.

The elves spoke in an ancient language Nie Yan wasn't proficient with: the language of the Elves. However, from their body language and expressions, he could roughly tell they were begging for forgiveness.

“Who here can speak Elvish?” Nie Yan turned around and asked the team.

The surrounding team members gazed at each other before shaking their heads. They only knew one language in the game, and that was the common language spoken in the empire. As for Elvish? From the start, let alone understanding it, no one had even heard of its existence before.

Nie Yan silently pondered. If no one knew Elvish, communicating with these two Dark Elves would basically be impossible.

He glanced at his own language menu. At present, there were only four languages: Common, Dragon, Ancient Common, and Kasate Giant. Suddenly, he had another thought, These Dark Elves are an ancient race and possess extremely long lifespans. Perhaps they'll understand other languages?

“Petty and frail Dark Elves, why have you come here?” Nie Yan spoke in Dragon Tongue.

Nie Yan spoke various syllables in a deep tone. The sound of his voice frightened the surrounding team members; however, they soon realized he was simply speaking another language.

Upon hearing the Dragon language, the two elves were badly frightened, even trembling as they gazed at Nie Yan. One of the elves who was somewhat more courageous continued to stare at him with caution and bewilderment. Eventually, he drummed up enough courage and crawled towards Nie Yan's feet, kissing them before he fell back and began to speak.

The elf also spoke in Dragon Tongue. “Long live the Dragon God. This one's name is Vasa Rhine. M'lord, I sincerely ask of you... are you of the dragon race, disguised as human?”

During the distant Dark Era, the Dark Elves were unlike the other races. As one of the races enslaved by the Dragon race, they didn't join the rebellion with races such as Humans, High Elves, and Dwarves in fighting for their freedom. Their society and faith remained pious in their belief of the dragons. Even now, those

existences that were currently hidden within the deepest corners of the world were still worthy of their reverence and loyalty.

Nie Yan felt elated. Humans who knew Dragon Tongue were few and far between. This Dark Elf had been scared witless and mistook him for an actual dragon. It's best if I take advantage of this misunderstanding!

“Indeed! Long live the Dragon God! Dark Elf Vasa Rhine, I do not wish to repeat myself. Why have you come to this place?” Nie Yan spoke in Dragon Tongue once again.

“M’lord, our Drow Dark Elf Tribe suffered a crushing defeat at the Hilton Stronghold. In the chaos and confusion, my companion and I passed through the plains and escaped to this forest,” Vasa Rhine replied.

“Ah? Dark Elf Vasa Rhine... So it turns out you two were deserters from the battle at Hilton Stronghold!”

“M’lord, we are not deserters! This one named Vasa Rhine is a brave and courageous soldier! We are gathering intelligence for our tribe. In the evening three days from now, our Drow Tribe will strike back at the Hilton Stronghold. At that time, Dark Elf Vasa Rhine will once again return to the battlefield!”

Vasa Rhine spoke with courage and conviction.

「System: New quest received! Bring the heads of the two Dark

Elves to Sir Kavrote in the Hilton Stronghold and inform him before the Drow Tribe commences their counterattack.」

A branching quest line! This was an exciting discovery; however, Nie Yan still maintained a calm and collected outer appearance. He continued to speak to Vasa Rhine as if everything was normal. As for the opposite party, Vasa Rhine believed Nie Yan was a dragon. He truthfully answered each and one of Nie Yan's questions without exception and didn't dare to conceal even a shred of information.

As Nie Yan and the Dark Elf continued to speak in the strange language, the team members had various thoughts. Just what were they talking about? Those Dark Elves seemed to be quite fearful of Nie Yan as well. Why was that? Everyone felt shocked. Just when did Nie Yan learn the language of other races?

“Dark Elf Vasa Rhine, the Treant Caretaker is a friend of mine. He informed me that you've stolen his flute. Tell me, how shall I enact your punishment?”

Upon hearing Nie Yan's words, Vasa Rhine kowtowed repeatedly and begged for forgiveness. He then took out the flute and handed it to Nie Yan.

The entire flute was lacquer black while its surface was carved in turtle shell patterns. As Nie Yan examined it, he noticed the flute appeared very simple and unadorned.

He then glanced at its properties.

Einpat's Flute (Quest Item)

Level Requirement: 0

Description: A flute used by the Treant Caretaker. Able to affect surrounding Treants.

Properties: Willpower +20, Strength +20, Reflex +20, Health +300. Reduces the stats of surrounding Treants by 50%.

User Restriction: Can only be equipped within the Treant Forest.

No mistake, that's the flute we're looking for. Once Nie Yan put the flute away, he sent an order through the team chat.「Kill them!」

The surrounding Mages raised their staffs and began chanting their magic. To the team's surprise, the two Dark Elves didn't resist and remained kneeling on the ground. They stayed motionless and silent as they awaited their deaths.

「Boom! Boom! Boom!」The spells rained down on the two elves. They remained firmly kneeling even when suffering the assault. It was only until their health bars fell empty that the two could no longer hold themselves up. Their lifeless corpses slumped to the ground, collapsing with a gentle thud that brought a small cloud of dust into the air.

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「System: You've obtained Dark Elf's Head. Quantity: 2」

“Alright, now that’s settled and done with. Good! They even dropped a pair of Warrior boots when they died. Decide between yourselves who gets it. We’ll be heading off to kill the Treant King next,” Nie Yan announced. This is going to be the first time in history a team finishes this dungeon with a perfect completion rate. Capturing those two Dark Elves led to a pleasant surprise.

“Nie Yan, what did you and those Dark Elves talk about? Why did it seem like they were very afraid of you? Not to mention when we were attacking them, they didn’t even dare to retaliate,” Yao Yao asked after walking to Nie Yan’s side.

The rest of the team also stared at Nie Yan with inquisitive gazes. Even Yu Lan couldn’t help but focus her attention on him.

Chapter 53 – Top Quality Round Shield

“Hmm... Oh that? That was nothing. I just spoke to them in Dragon Tongue, and they mistook me for a real dragon. The Dark Elves have been slaves to the Dragon race since the ancient Dark Era. Even in the present, their society still considers themselves servants of the dragons which is why they were so respectful and fearful of me. Thanks to the information they provided, I also received a branching quest line so I’ll be handing it in after we return to town,” Nie Yan replied.

“Dragon Tongue? When did you learn the Dragon language?” Yao Yao asked. It appeared Nie Yan still held quite a few secrets since he continued revealing surprises one after the other.

“Yeah! I heard dragons were extremely rare,” Tang Yao added. Nie Yan was truly becoming more and more outstanding; even the language of the dragons wasn’t out of his reach.

In the same moment, Dusk’s eyes sparkled as he thought of a certain possibility. Could Nie Yan’s ability to speak Dragon Tongue be related to the emergence of that dragon in Link town?

Nie Yan soon realized his slip of the tongue and turned to look at Dusk. From the expression on the latter’s face, he could tell this fellow had grasped onto some clues.

“Yesterday, actually. I ended up accidentally stumbling into a ravine where I found an old book. When I turned the pages, I discovered it was actually an old history which recorded the events

of past eras. Before I knew it, I received an announcement telling me I learned the Dragon Tongue, Kasate Giant, and Ancient Common. Afterward, that dragon emerged and chased me around before I managed to make a lucky escape,” Nie Yan replied in a casual manner.

This explanation was specifically directed towards Dusk. He felt it was better to partially tell the truth than to allow the existence of the Chapter of Courage to be leaked.

Dusk readily accepted the explanation. After all, he didn't too feel good sticking his nose so deeply into another person's secrets either.

“Truthfully, learning new languages isn't that hard at all. Head over to the library when your levels are higher, and if you pay one gold, you'll be able to learn the Ancient Common language. Also, if you head to the libraries belonging to the Giant race, you'll be able to learn the Kasate Giant language after paying three gold.”

“How do you know all this?” Dusk and the others asked in astonishment.

“Head over to the library and look for yourself. Just browse through some the books there, and you'll have an even better understanding of the entire Atlanta continent. There are various profession related books as well. If you manage to read them all, I guarantee you'll be experts as well.”

“Ahhh? Who the hell goes to the library? An entire library has so

many books. Even if you randomly pull one off the shelf, it'll still have up to million characters! If I had to read every profession and history related book in the library, it would take me a month at the very least! Who the hell has that much free time on their hands?"

"Yeah! Who has the time to read those thick and heavy books?"

In his past life, Nie Yan often suffered setbacks while playing his Thief and developed an interest in reading as a result. After spending over a month reading at the library, he couldn't help but admit the history of the Atlanta continent as well as its stories were quite fascinating and engaging. From the origins of his profession to the biographies of legendary Thieves and their abilities, he read it all without missing a single word. Thanks to his exceptional memory, he gained many insights. By the time he walked out of the library, he left with a thorough understanding of his profession. After several more years of polishing his skills, he ranked as one of the top fifty Thieves and was somewhat famous.

"I've only read a few myself. The biographies there are pretty well written," Nie Yan said with a smile.

Nie Yan still had the leisure to go to the library and read? They had frequently risked life and death to reach their current level, yet they were still easily overtaken by Nie Yan. The crowd couldn't help but feel a little disheartened at such a thought.

Many of the team members sighed deeply and no longer had the heart to inquire any further.

“Who knows what sort of rewards you’ll receive after turning in that quest!” Bai Kaisui (Plain Boiled Water) exclaimed, voicing out a similar thought among the crowd. Ultimately the topic everyone still cared for the most was the quest rewards.

“What was that flute that dropped just a moment ago?”

“It’s a quest item called Einpat’s Flute. We’ll have to return it to that old man before we exit the dungeon.” Nie Yan displayed the flute’s properties for the rest of the team to see, whereupon everyone inhaled a breath of cold air. The flute’s properties were simply astonishing. If it could be brought outside of the dungeon, it would most certainly cause every player to go crazy over it.

However, Nie Yan didn’t feel too much of a loss regarding this flute because he already possessed the Chapter of Courage.

“Ahhh! It’s such a pity! Why do we have to return it to the NPC?”

Many of the team members felt aggrieved.

Nie Yan opened the trade menu and traded the flute over to Bai Kaisui. This item had to be handed over to the team’s main tank for it to be used to its fullest potential.

“Holy crap! I have over seven hundred health! Even if it’s the Treant King, I’ll have nothing to be afraid of!” Bai Kaisui confidently boasted after checking his improved stats.

“Don’t underestimate the Treant King on Specialist. That thing is really difficult to deal with. Wait and see. You’ll be eating your own words very soon.” After splashing cold water over Bai Kaisui’s parade, Nie Yan said, “Since our Priests aren’t able to learn Revive yet, we’ll have a much easier time if two of them can cast Lesser Heal. I know another location that drops a Lesser Heal skill book so we’ll be heading there next.”

“No way, right? Is the Treant King really that difficult to deal with on Specialist difficulty?” Bai Kaisui asked in shock.

After all, he had never faced the Treant King on this difficulty before. He quickly reigned himself in after listening to Nie Yan’s words.

...

From the moment they entered this dungeon to now, the profits the team earned surpassed everyone’s expectations. Even if they discounted the items Nie Yan took for himself, the amount of equipment and skill books they obtained still far exceeded their imaginations. They even thought it would be great if Nie Yan could continue carrying their team just like this. However, this was nothing more than wishful thinking. He was never part of their team in the first place, and his cooperation with them would end after this run. Furthermore, he would never join their team in another dungeon run again. When they thought back to his previous statements, they couldn’t help but feel a little angry. They grumbled and voiced complaints in their hearts. Why did Chen Bo have to go and piss off Nie Yan? Originally, they too had felt somewhat dissatisfied when they witnessed Nie Yan driving

Chen Bo out. After all, Chen Bo was still a member of their team and Nie Yan's actions at that time really did seem excessive. Yet at present, they were having a subtle change of heart.

Having obtained Einpat's Flute, Bai Kaisui became a genuine and formidable meatshield. With a Priest casting Lesser Heal from the backline, he became an unequalled tank that was able to contend against five Treants alone. After he equipped the flute, it became much easier for the team to clear the path ahead.

As they progressed through the run, the amount of equipment they looted quickly piled up. They obtained another Lesser Heal skill book and two pieces of Silver-grade equipment. One of them was a pair of Thieve gloves which was given to Nie Yan. They increased Strength by three and Awareness by two. The other piece was a recently dropped round shield that raised defense by fifteen percent and increased Physique by five. When the shield dropped, everyone's eyes went wide with shock because it was the first time they had seen such a high-quality shield.

Round shields were fundamentally different from normal shields. Their defense was relatively lower compared to regular shields. However, their low weight meant they didn't hinder a player's movements as much as a regular shield would. Thus, round shields with high defense were a hot and very costly commodity in the marketplace.

"Damn! Even the round shield we got from Blackflame Forest wasn't as good as this one." Dusk widened his eyes in shock. What kind of drop rate was this? Good equipment was just dropping one after another as they progressed towards the boss. He didn't mind

passing on the previous drops because they were only Bronze-grade. However, at present, such an amazing Silver-grade round shield suddenly appeared! “If you guys are willing to sell, I guarantee my captain would be willing to pay ten silvers or even higher for that round shield!”

Everyone present understood the significance of a Heavy Knight with a good shield. A tank that was able to withstand a boss’ attacks ensured the survival of the whole team. Therefore, Heavy Knight equipment with high defense was extremely expensive on the marketplace. The bidding on this type of equipment in the auction house reached new records. However, even so, they remained targets for teams from the larger guilds.

“We don’t plan on selling this shield!” Yu Lan took in a deep breath of air. This shield meant they could still try and take on higher level dungeons even without Nie Yan’s help. Let alone ten silvers, even if it was for twenty silvers, she still wouldn’t sell.

Chapter 54 – Treant King

Yu Lan (Blue Feather) glanced at Nie Yan who stood off to the side in a laissez-faire manner. She thought of the ever-increasing amount of favours they owed him. If this continued, it would soon reach a point where they couldn't possibly repay him.

“Yao Yao (Dark Mystery), give Nie Yan our thanks. We would've never been able to get all this good equipment if it weren't for him,” Yu Lan suggested. In retrospect, Nie Yan's conditions hadn't been excessive at all.

“Mhm,” Yao Yao replied. She then walked to Nie Yan's side, her bright eyes examining his expression as she approached.

“What are you looking at me for?” Nie Yan glanced at Yao Yao and smiled.

“We'll be taking the round shield. You really don't mind losing out on it?” Yao Yao faintly smiled and a pair of dimples emerged on her unblemished face.

Nie Yan's pulse slightly raced after seeing her elegant yet bewitching smile. However, when he thought of Xie Yao, he immediately regained his composure. “It's just a round shield. Do you really think I'm that stingy of a person? In any case, I'm already pretty satisfied as it is. I get to take any useful drops I want, and the Featherfall Jewel from the Treant King goes to me as well. When we entered the dungeon, did you guys not put in effort too? I definitely couldn't clear this dungeon on my own,” he

replied.

“Well, that shield is worth quite a bit of money. My captain asked me to thank you on the team’s behalf.”

“Oh?” Nie Yan glanced at the nearby Yu Lan. She was tall, slender, and had a voluptuous figure which could be called perfect. If there were a few more smiles on her face, then she would be rated as quite decent. Moreover, from his memory, he recalled she was quite a prideful figure. It was seldom that she would ever lower her head to someone.

As for what he knew about her, it was limited to a certain event where a player took too many liberties with her, and she retaliated by going on a rampage and killing him until he dropped back to Level 0. At that point in time, the only thought on Nie Yan’s mind was that this woman was extremely terrifying. However, after becoming more familiar with each other, he came to understand she had a quiet and amiable personality. Thus, she never left him with any sort of bad impression. Besides glancing back at her figure every once in awhile, he didn’t really have many opinions of her. He had never really chatted much with her either and by the end, they were nothing more than nodding acquaintances.

...

With the new equipment spurring them forward, the team members became even more spirited as they cleared mobs, especially Bai Kaisui (Plain Boiled Water) who charged into every battle. Nie Yan and the others took a detour and headed onto a smaller path where they encountered a group of five Treants.

Shortly after making swift work of those Treants, another Lesser Heal skill book dropped from one of their corpses, just as Nie Yan had said earlier. From then on, the number of Priests who could cast Lesser Heal on their team rose to two.

As their group progressed, they completely cleared the path of any and all Treants. Eventually, they penetrated into the deepest part of the forest and entered a clearing. The surrounding vegetation visibly lessened. Moreover, no more Treants emerged on the path and even the presence of fauna and insects disappeared.

“We’re almost there. Be wary of the vines beneath your feet,” Nie Yan warned as he raised his guard. He walked at the front of the group and opened up a path by disarming each and every trap along the route. As the team drew closer to the centre of the forest, two vines which were lying motionless on the ground suddenly sprang to life. Like real serpents, the two vines snaked their way closer and shot towards Nie Yan.

Nie Yan sidestepped the attack and switched to a reverse grip. 「Slash!」The vines were severed upon meeting his blade and fell to the ground.

The people in the back also suffered attacks; however, they were safer due to their numbers. Even if actual danger befell one of the members, the others around them could come to the rescue. Therefore, no problems occurred in the back.

After passing through the clearing, Nie Yan and the team finally caught sight of the Treant King. It resembled an immense tree

towering at [over ten meters high and several meters wide](#)—many times larger than the average Treant. Its leaves and branches shrouded the entire sky and cast an immense shadow over the area. However, its most distinct feature lay in the ash black bark that covered its entire body.

The Treant King awoke from its deep slumber, aware of the approaching players as a cold, sinister glow radiated from its ancient eyes.

Treant King (Lord): Level 5

Health: 10,000/10,000

“It’s Lord-class!” Dusk screamed in shock. The Treant King had only been an Elite-class monster when he and his team ran this dungeon. Not only did this version have much more health than its normal difficulty counterpart, it was even upgraded to a higher class!

If it weren’t for such an overpowered item like Einpat’s Flute, even if the entire elite team from Holy Empire came over and joined them, they’d likely still end up being wiped.

“Everyone, prepare yourselves and get into formation. Wait for the Heavy Knight to engage before going in. There’s no need to feel anxious. Just listen to my commands,” Nie Yan reassured before sprinting towards the Treant King.

He stopped upon entering the boss’ line of sight.

“Wretched humans! For trespassing my territory... DIE!” The Treant King roared deeply and slammed a gigantic branch towards Nie Yan.「BOOM!」Its gigantic arm left a deep mark on the earth. However, Nie Yan had already rolled out of the way.

At that moment, Nie Yan had already fled and circled around its side. The Treant King raised its gigantic arm again and swept it towards Nie Yan.

As he watched the massive arm spanning towards him, Nie Yan abruptly lowered his body and slipped into a slide.「VOOM!」The Treant’s sweeping attack hurtled above and past his head. The fierce pressure alone was enough to cause pain as the wind scraped against his cheek.

Just a little bit slower and I would’ve been swatted into the air by its attack.

Nie Yan got up and fled in the other direction. Although the Treant King was overbearing and fierce, during the whole course of events, none of its attacks were able to reach Nie Yan who evaded like a slippery loach.

An average team would have most likely sent their Heavy Knight, who held Einpat’s Flute, to engage first since only that player could withstand the attacks of the Treant King. However, they would have neglected one key point: Heavy Knights, as their namesake would suggest, wore heavy armour which caused their movements to be hindered and clumsy. They were unable to dodge the Treant

King's attacks which had a strong knockback effect. Thus, they had no chance of closing in on the Treant King without others covering for them. However, if another player were to be struck by an attack, they would undoubtedly die.

Nie Yan's movements seemed awkward whenever he evaded the Treant King's attacks. Each time the team believed he was going to die from one of the attacks, they would discover he miraculously survived by dodging, rolling, or jumping out of the way at the very last second. More or less, he appeared to be more scared than hurt as he survived every encounter without mishap.

Dusk, however, felt shocked by Nie Yan's actions. Holy shit! He can even do this? What a godly Thief! He subconsciously began comparing Nie Yan with the other Thieves in his team. However, he suddenly came to the realization that there wasn't a single Thief within Holy Empire who could compare to Nie Yan! If there were a Thief with even half of Nie Yan's skills in his team, they'd already be quite terrific.

From Nie Yan's perspective, the Treant King's attacks were slow and predictable. Each attack gave more than a second of reaction time to get out of the way. Thus, evading its attacks really wasn't much of a problem.

It was simple and extremely easy, just like an adult being asked to do a grade schooler's math homework.

After making sure the boss' aggro was fully on him, Nie Yan gave an order through the team chat.「Bai Kaisui, take the lead and engage the boss. The rest of the frontliners will follow after.

Backline, under no circumstances are you to go within thirty meters of the boss!」

Bai Kaisui rushed towards the Treant King. Since the boss' attention was completely focused on Nie Yan, he quickly arrived in front of it. He struck the boss with Shield Bash and followed with Heroic Strike.

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“Dammit! The Treant King has such high defense!”

Even with Einpat's Flute, his attacks still dealt so little damage to it.

Shortly after Bai Kaisui's engaged the boss, the other frontliners arrived as well and firmly surrounded the Treant King.

Under Bai Kaisui's fierce assault, the boss' aggro quickly shifted. It swept its arm and began attacking him instead.

「Mages, attack!」Just when Nie Yan finished speaking, numerous spells flew into the air.「Bang! Bang! Bang!」The spells bombarded the Treant King's body.

Roughly a dozen damage numbers appeared above the Treant King's head before drifting upwards and fading away. Most of

them were in the low tens and some of them were even misses. However, two of them were in the thirties. These were the attacks from Dusk and Tang Yao.

Dusk's Dark Winter set and Tang Yao's Fire Chaser set were both from Blackflame Forest. Thus, both of their damage numbers were rather decent.

Chapter 55 – The Rhythm Of A Boss Battle

The Treant King's extremely thick bark served as an effective defense against the players' attacks. Therefore, the damage they dealt could be considered quite decent.

The king indignantly roared as it hoisted its massive arm into the air and swiped at Bai Kaisui (Plain Boiled Water).「Bang!」Its gigantic branch of an arm slammed into his shield. However, Bai Kaisui kept his centre of gravity low and allowed the shield to absorb the majority of the impact. It resulted in him being pushed back a few steps; however, he ran forward and closed the distance immediately. Bai Kaisui felt grateful for the advice given to him prior, of how he should remain stable and firm. Sure enough, it became quite useful in this situation. Ordinarily, he wouldn't have merely been pushed back a few steps in such an exchange; rather, he would have likely been sent flying.

Those strikes were quite horrifying, each one reducing his health by eighty or so points. However, he was the sole person able to withstand its attacks, as the other frontliners would inevitably die within two strikes.

Beams of gentle light fell on the players who were in a melee with the boss. In the meantime, Nie Yan evaluated the strength of the team's healers. Of the three Priests who knew Lesser Heal, the main one healed roughly sixty health while the remaining two barely reached fifty. Not that high. Things will likely get dangerous later. Seems like it's best to remain careful and not leave anything to chance.

Due to the efforts of Bai Kaisui and the other frontliners, the flow of the battle stabilized. Thus, the Mages could begin steadily casting their magic.

「Cast fire elemental magic as much as possible and avoid ice magic. It won't be effective since the boss' ice resistance is too high,」Nie Yan ordered and circled round the Treant's back since his profession received a damage bonus, thirty percent, while attacking opponents from behind. Paired with his exceptional equipment, his attacks easily pierced its strong defenses.

Sparks flew off its body and into the air as magic poured from the sky. Its health had been gradually chipped away and now neared seventy percent.

「Do any of our Priests have Dispel?」

「One of them does!」

「Great! Pay attention to Bai Kaisui! Immediately cast Dispel when the boss casts the fear debuff on him. Don't be slow; even a second can cost us a lot of trouble!」Nie Yan said.

The Priest felt somewhat anxious as he listened to Nie Yan's instructions. After all, he was still a novice at the game.

He was nicknamed Bamboo Pole by Bai Kaisui and the others due to his naturally lanky build. He felt quite nervous at the moment, anxiously gripping his staff while his muscles appeared to have

been frozen stiff. However, Nie Yan noticed his apprehension and spoke reassuringly.「Relax a bit. I'll remind you when the time comes, so all you'll have to do is cast Dispel on my signal.」

Afterward, Bamboo Pole shot a grateful glance at Nie Yan.

Just as its health reached seventy percent, the boss released a deep roar that sent shivers down everyone's spine.

Meanwhile, Bai Kaisui halted his attacks and involuntarily retreated back while his movements became extremely rigid.

「Dispel!」Nie Yan shouted through the team's voice chat. Without delay, Bamboo Pole cast Dispel and a bright light illuminated Bai Kaisui from above.

Bai Kaisui had only retreated a few steps when feared. He charged back into battle and slammed his shield at the Treant King with Shield Bash.

「Not bad!」Nie Yan praised.

Bamboo Pole instantly felt relief seeing as his spell succeeded.

Following Nie Yan's directions, the entire team fell into the rhythm of battle. Coupled with the fact that he knew the Treant King's actions in advance, its health bar steadily fell lower.

It's using Lash!

The Treant King lifted its vines and sent them lashing at Bai Kaisui.

「Priests, prepare to heal Bai Kaisui in three... two... one... now!」

A gentle shower of light shone on Bai Kaisui and his health continuously teetered up and down; the line separating life and death lay on a razor thin edge. However, thanks to the Priests, his health managed to hold until the end.

Nie Yan, on the other hand, released a flurry of attacks from behind. Roughly three minutes later, the entire team had steadily chipped away as its health fell to merely twenty-five percent.

「Priests, how much mana remaining?」

「67!」

「56!」

「23!」

「The Priest with twenty-three mana, drink your Mana Potion!」

The Priest downed a Basic Mana Potion after Nie Yan called him

out.

...

Suddenly, the Treant King transformed into a shade of red.

「Finally... Everyone, get ready! Bai Kaisui, switch to a defensive stance! Mages, increase your damage output! Priests, prepare yourselves!」Nie Yan shouted. Bai Kaisui, in the moment he heard these instructions, held the shield to his chest and switched stances.

The Treant King let out an explosive roar. It raised its arms and slammed down on Bai Kaisui.

「Bang!」

The Treant King's gigantic arms landed on Bai Kaisui's shield and sent him several steps back, losing over two hundred health in the exchange. However, even after such a terrifying attack, the Treant King was unwilling to give up. It raised its arm once more and relentlessly smashed.

「Bang! Bang!」

The assault left two more craters in the earth while a gentle shower of light fell on Bai Kaisui in between the attacks.

-221

+60

-256

+52

Above Bai Kaisui's head, four numbers floated upwards as he was repelled back.

「Such high damage!」

If it weren't for Einpat's Flute, just one of those attacks would instantly kill even the most powerful Fighter.

Bai Kaisui felt a cold chill run down his spine as he glanced at his health bar. If it weren't for the timely heals from the Priests, he would have long been dead.

The Treant King had finished its three-hit combo and seemed to have come to a rest. However, a moment later, it continued its onslaught of battering their tank.

「Bai Kaisui, pull back! The rest of you guys, hold the line for a bit!」Nie Yan began running to Bai Kaisui's side.

Bai Kaisui dodge rolled the Treant King's next attack and downed a Basic Health Potion. However, the amount of health restored was basically negligible compared to his current total health.

The other frontliners rushed up to take Bai Kaisui's place, forming a human shield as they blocked the Treant King's advance. However, they could only hold it off for a limited time since their defense and health were much lower in comparison to the one they were replacing.

Nie Yan arrived at Bai Kaisui's side and applied an Intermediate Combat Bandage.

+20... +20... +20...

“Drink a Basic Recovery Potion!”

“I already drank one.”

“Wait for the next round of healing from the Priests!”

Two Priests cast Lesser Heal on Bai Kaisui. After ten seconds, more than half of his health had recovered.

The other frontliners couldn't hold on much longer. There was no one left to take another attack. After all, two hits and any one of them would be dead. If the Treant King scored a critical hit, even if they were full health, they would instantly die. Furthermore, two of their members had already been killed and sent to the graveyard.

“Bai Kaisui, go back in!” Nie Yan ordered when Bai Kaisui’s health had recovered past four hundred.

Bai Kaisui raised his shield and ran up to meet the boss. They had been in a state of crisis just now. Thus, no one dared to be any more careless. Tang Yao, Dusk, and the rest of the backline took out their most powerful spells, unloading each and every one on the Treant King.

「I’ll be out of mana soon!」Tang Yao anxiously said.

「Cast Arcane Fireballs! It expends the least amount of mana. Warriors and Paladins, go all out! Use Flame Slash!」Nie Yan replied. They only needed to hold out for a little longer. Victory was right before their eyes. They absolutely couldn’t fail at the final stretch of the battle. He circled behind the Treant King and used Vital Strike followed by Assassinate.

The Treant’s health steadily fell: nine percent... eight percent... six percent...

The team became increasingly nervous; none of them were willing to slow down by the slightest degree.

「Bang! Bang! Bang!」Fireballs landed on the Treant King’s body and left deep wounds upon impact.

Three percent!

「All frontliners, retreat! Mages, give it everything you've got!」
Nie Yan suddenly instructed through the team chat.

The Warriors and Paladins didn't understand why Nie Yan would have them retreat at such a crucial moment. However, they still listened to his orders without the slightest hint of hesitation and pulled back. Nie Yan had been the one who carried them to this point in the run. Thus, they had unwittingly come to acknowledge his ability and held faith in his commands.

Chapter 56 – Featherfall Jewel

Heaving one of its massive stumps into the air, the Treant King forcefully stamped on the ground.

War Trample!

「BOOM!」

Like a giant hammer striking the surface, the stump transmitted a powerful force deep into the earth which violently shook the ground. Soon, large fractures began forming on the surface, spreading to the nearby surroundings, appearing as if they would rend the entire world asunder.

Then powerful shock waves erupted from the depths, pouring volatile magical energy onto the surface.

The frontliners felt their hearts tighten as they witnessed the tyrannical might of this skill because likely then and there, they would have been instantly killed were it not for Nie Yan ordering them to retreat. Furthermore, with their absence and only the ranged units remaining, the team would certainly lack the damage necessary to finish off the boss, leading to a possible wipe as a consequence. Often times even the slightest of mistakes could reverse the outcome of a battle.

“Re-engage! The boss doesn’t have much health left. Faster everyone, faster!” Nie Yan shouted. Their next step was to simply finish off the Treant King, then everything would be fine. Besides,

with so little health remaining, it couldn't possibly do any more to reverse the situation.

“Heroic Strike!”

“Radiant Slash!”

A volley of magic poured into the sky.「Bang! Bang! Bang!」The spells blasted its body, depleting the boss of what little health it had remaining. Upon entering its death throes, the Treant King mournfully moaned as cracks began appearing all over its body. A moment later...「Boom!」An explosion rocked the area as its body splintered into pieces and fell to the ground as a pile of wood debris.

“The Treant King is dead!”

“We succeeded!”

All of the team members excitedly cheered. For a team like theirs, clearing this Specialist dungeon was simply a remarkable and unimaginable achievement.

In the exact moment they toppled the Treant King over, everyone felt like they were in a dream as if everything that happened wasn't real. However, this dream was in fact reality, and an indescribable feeling of admiration arose in their hearts. Before meeting Nie Yan, their team hadn't even been able to clear this dungeon on Easy difficulty. Yet while following his lead, they were

able to directly beat it on Specialist difficulty—truly an inconceivable feat.

Seeing everyone's joyous and excited expressions, Nie Yan broke into a smile because he was very much the same when he cleared a dungeon for the very first time.

Tang Yao, Yao Yao (Dark Mystery), Yu Lan (Blue Feather), and Bai Kaisui (Plain Boiled Water) were among the eight people who leveled up. Meanwhile, Nie Yan's experience bar had risen to fifty-two percent. As one could quite easily tell, the Treant King had given an ample and generous amount of experience.

Nie Yan dug through the pile of wood debris. Despite finding two pieces of equipment, they weren't the item he was looking for so he continued his search. He brushed aside the branches and twigs and jolted in elation when a bright blue gem entered his vision. This is exactly what I was looking for!

This gem was completely different from ordinary gems. Resembling a diamond, it was carved with many facets and blossomed with a dazzling radiance.

He quickly appraised the gem with Transcendent Insight. Featherfall Jewel... Ah, it's the Featherfall Jewel! I finally have it in my hands...

"Two pieces of equipment and a jewel dropped. One of them is a Silver-grade hat for Arcane Mages, and the other is a Silver-grade armour for Paladins. As for the jewel, I'll be taking it for myself,"

Nie Yan announced. Even if he wanted to take the equipment, he wouldn't have to pay money. However, the other members had to pay the rest of the team with their bid if they wanted the equipment.

At this moment, not a single person raised any objections.

The Arcane Mage hat went to Dusk for the low price of one silver and fifty coppers. Thanks to this, he didn't come out of the trip empty-handed. The Paladin armour was taken away by Yu Lan for two silvers. Since many of the members were part of her team, and its value was divided evenly, most of the money stayed with her team and she only had to pay Dusk, Tang Yao, and Nie Yan a few coppers.

“What kind of jewel is that? Share the properties with me,” Dusk asked. He was rather curious about the jewel in Nie Yan's hands. After all, the only reason the latter ran this Specialist dungeon was for the sake of this jewel.

Nie Yan shared the Featherfall Jewel's properties.

Featherfall Jewel (Dark Gold): Ornament

Level Requirement: 0

Properties: Defense 8–10, Strength +7. Can be equipped with the accessory slot or embedded into jewelry slot where applicable.

Featherfall: Activate to allow the player to fall like a feather through the air. Duration: 3 minutes.

Weight: 1 lb

User Restriction: Can be equipped by all factions.

Excluding rings, necklaces, and medallions, every player had five slots which players could equip accessories. Nie Yan equipped the Featherfall Jewel into one of his accessory slots.

“So it was Dark Gold accessory! No wonder you cared about it so much!” Dusk exclaimed in surprise. The properties on this Featherfall Jewel weren’t that great but its Featherfall ability was quite rare; otherwise, it wouldn’t be classified as a Dark Gold-grade

Through this entire run, even if they were to add up all the equipment they received up till now, it still wouldn’t be equal in value to the equipment Nie Yan obtained for himself. Some team members felt this was a little unfair; however, they quickly erased this thought and quickly got over it. Without Nie Yan, let alone clearing this Specialist dungeon, they wouldn’t have even obtained a single hair.

“How much Honour points did your team receive?” Nie Yan glanced at Yu Lan and asked.

“Around twelve hundred. Thank you,” Yu Lan looked at Nie Yan and sincerely thanked him.

“So much? Even when my team cleared Blackflame Forest, we only received eight hundred,” Dusk exclaimed in fright. He began to think Specialist difficulty truly wasn’t simple. This was merely Treant Forest. If they were to run Blackflame Forest or Agmota Muddy Swamplands on Specialist, he’d imagine the rewards would

definitely be much more generous.

“You guys can head to Blackflame Forest or the Fallen Shaman Camp now. If you haven’t gone to those dungeons before, you should take some time to prepare,” Nie Yan said.

“Will you come with us?” Yao Yao gazed at Nie Yan and asked.

Yu Lan and the rest also perked their ears up while waiting for Nie Yan’s reply. However, Yu Lun also understood her team’s little temple wasn’t big enough for a deity such as Nie Yan to stay in.

Nie Yan faintly smiled and said, “Like I said before, I won’t be following you guys to Blackflame forest.” He definitely wouldn’t have a pleasant time running a dungeon together with a person like Chen Bo. However, if Yu Lan and the others kicked Chen Bo out of the team, he would think it over. Even then, it was simply thinking it over. He’d have to check whether he had the free time.

“Oh...” Yao Yao felt somewhat disappointed.

“In a few days, Brother Nie is going with us to run the Agmota Muddy Swamplands,” Dusk interjected. He was now thoroughly convinced of Nie Yan’s ability. Being able to run another dungeon with this expert was truly a wonderful matter for him.

Tang Yao gazed at Nie Yan with expectation in his eyes. He wanted Nie Yan to bring him along as well.

Nie Yan sent a whisper to Tang Yao.「Your skills aren't there yet. Agmota Muddy Swamplands has very high requirements for Mages. You can practice by following Yu Lan and her group for now. Then when you're good enough, I'll bring you along on the harder dungeon runs.」

「Alright, I understand.」Tang Yao nodded his head. Nie Yan wouldn't lie to him. If he did tag along for the Agmota Muddy Swamplands and couldn't keep up, he'd likely lose face for Nie Yan. He calmed himself before resolving to run a few more dungeons with Yu Lan and her team. That way he could polish up his skills.

“How about letting Tang Yao tag along with you guys for Blackflame and the Fallen Shaman Camp? As for those dungeons, I can give you guys a bit of advice,” Nie Yan suggested.

Yu Lan nodded her head and said, “We're extremely glad to have him. From now on, he'll be part of our team.” Tang Yao's magic damage was quite high. His contributions in this run were great as well. For this kind of person to be willing to stay on their team, she couldn't be any happier. Moreover, with Tang Yao here, Nie Yan would definitely give them some advice instead of keeping it from them.

With the item distribution finished, besides the Uncanny Dodge skill book, the Forest Necklace, and the Featherfall Jewel, Nie Yan also received three silvers. Meanwhile, Tang Yao earned his first large profit and received roughly sixty coppers.

Chapter 57 – Generous Rewards

“Is there anything we still need to do?” Dusk asked.

“Return the flute to Einpat,” Nie Yan replied. He glanced at Bai Kaisui (Plain Boiled Water) and said, “Hand the flute to me.”

At the end of the day the flute was a quest item and never belonged to him in the first place. Bai Kaisui inwardly sighed and handed the flute back to Nie Yan.

Nie Yan eyed the forest thickets and spotted a decrepit old man walking unsteadily towards them.

“Respected Senior, we’ve punished those despicable Dark Elves and retrieved your flute.”

“Good! Yes, this is indeed my flute! Thank you, brave adventurers. There’ll be no need to navigate the winding and twisting paths on your return. I’ll send you all to the exit myself. May the Divine bless you!”

Had Nie Yan and the others tried to keep the flute, they would have incurred Einpat’s wrath and likely found themselves in a perilous situation. Ultimately the Treant Forest would have become a resting place for their bones.

「System: Side quest “Einpat’s Missing Flute” has been completed. You have received 28,596 experience points.」

Shortly after Nie Yan received this notification, a thick fog emerged and enveloped the team; the elderly Einpat disappeared as well. When the fog finally dissipated and everyone could see clearly again, they discovered they had been returned to the entrance of the forest.

“We can still collect another reward by going to the commander in Calore!” Nie Yan glanced at his experience bar. Among his teammates, he received the largest share of the experience because he had contributed the most during Einpat’s quest. Moreover, after gaining the experience from the side quest, his experience bar rose to seventy-three percent.

Everyone was in high spirits. It truly felt great following Nie Yan into a dungeon. After receiving the reward, their experience bars once again rose by a large chunk.

...

After travelling back to Tellak town, the entire team took the transport point to Calore.

Upon arriving, Nie Yan headed directly for the barracks.

Their destination was to the southwest of the city. When they arrived at the outer perimeter of the barracks, they saw tall walls with many sentries posted atop. Overall, it appeared the defenses and security of this place were fairly tight. Nie Yan and his group didn’t enter the barracks but rather the lofty white tower that

stood beside. This was the building where Commander Kavrote was stationed.

As they entered, the group could see there weren't many NPCs within the building. However, a tall middle-aged man with a face full of scars and wore the military uniform of the Viridian Empire still walked over to greet them.

Nie Yan used Transcendent Insight to examine this NPC—Commander Kavrote.

“Youngsters, what business do you have coming to this place?”

“Lord Commander, we caught two Dark Elves lurking inside Treant Forest. After interrogating them, we received some information that concerns the safety of Hilton Stronghold. Here are the heads of the two Dark Elves we caught.”

Commander Kavrote followed up with a few more questions while Nie Yan answered accordingly in the formal manner which was standard in player-to-NPC interaction. Afterward, he handed the Dark Elf heads over to Commander Kavrote.

「System: Side quest “Deliver the Information” has been completed.」

「System: Your Influence in Hilton Stronghold has increased by 11.」

「System: Your Influence in Calore has increased by 11.」

「System: You have received 32,320 experience points.」

「System: You have learned Fighting from Commander Kavrote.」

「System: You have gained +2 Strength.」

「System: You have received 2 silvers.」

Some hidden quests gave additional stats as quest rewards. Nie Yan never expected this quest was one of them or to be so lucky as to receive two additional points in Strength.

Each member of the team received decent experience and money as rewards. Meanwhile, Nie Yan's experience bar rose to ninety-seven percent. As for the two silvers he also received as a reward, they simply didn't count for much considering the amount of wealth he already possessed.

Rather than grinding mobs, it seemed much easier to level up by doing quests. However, quests were divided into different levels. The higher the difficulty of the quest, the more experience points it would give. For example, relatively simple quests such as gathering animal furs would give very little experience as a reward. While in team quests, the rewards each individual received would be based on their own contribution in the quest. In the case of this quest as well as Einpat's, Nie Yan had contributed the most, thus he received the most experience, while the other

members received much less in comparison.

“Well we’ve handed in the quest so I should probably get going now,” Nie Yan said to Yao Yao (Dark Mystery) and the others.

“What are you gonna do now after handing in the quest?” Yao Yao asked. She was somewhat reluctant to part.

“Killing monsters and levelling up. However, where I’m going you guys are certainly unable to follow,” Nie Yan replied. Since he now had both the Featherfall Jewel and Ring of Woven Silk, there were many places he could try going to.

“Since he’s busy, let’s make our team and level up,” Dusk suggested. With so many high damage Mages on this team, it would be too much of waste if they separated now.

“Fatty over here has the Meteor spell. It’s got good area of effect and is decent at mobbing groups of monsters, so you probably won’t be levelling slowly with him on the team,” Nie Yan suggested. He was planning to have Tang Yao familiarize himself with the others so he would no longer have to worry about not being able to find a team. After receiving numerous pointers from Nie Yan over such a long period of time, Tang Yao’s had skills soared in proficiency. Though he still couldn’t be called an expert, he would have absolutely no problems assisting this team. After all, low-level dungeons and killing mobs generally weren’t too challenging for an Arcane Mage.

“Meteor!?” Everyone was surprised. At this point in the game,

Mages who knew offensive area of effect spells could best be described as being as rare as a phoenix feather.

“Why didn’t we see you use it earlier in the dungeon?” Bai Kaisui asked.

“Using that skill in the dungeon? Do you think I’m looking to die!?” Before entering, Nie Yan specifically warned him not to cast Meteor while in the dungeon. Tang Yao had taken this warning very seriously. Therefore he sounded quite blunt and forceful in his reply.

“Oh right. Haha...” Bai Kaisui awkwardly smiled and scratched his head. Casting large area of effect spells would frequently alert many mobs and build up a lot of aggro at the same time. In such a case, the frontliners wouldn’t be able to keep the monsters from getting to the backline.

“So it turns out he actually he had Meteor! Why are we still wasting our time here?” Dusk rubbed his hands together. He was getting a little impatient to see the might of the rare Meteor spell for himself.

“I’ll be taking my leave first then,” Nie Yan said goodbye to everyone. Though after seeing Yao Yao’s unhappy appearance, he laughed and said, “Next time, I’ll kill monsters with you guys. How about it?”

“Remember those words because you’re not allowed go back on them!” Yao Yao widened her eyes, sounding pleasantly surprised.

Her bright and colourful smile was as dazzling as the sun. She didn't know why but she felt like she had known Nie Yan for a very long time despite them only being acquainted for a few days. They seemed to have a sort of unusually familiarity and understanding with each other.

Nie Yan laughed and said, "Sure."

After leaving the group, Nie Yan began walking over to Calore's auction house.

Meanwhile, the others in the group gazed at Nie Yan's departing back. Only when his figure disappeared into the crowded streets did they finally regain their senses.

"C'mon, let's go and train."

When Dusk saw Nie Yan disappear into the crowd, he turned around and said, "Yeah, let's head out." As they departed the area, he sent a message to Sleepy Fox.

「Captain, take a look at this video.」

「What kind of video?」

「Just watch it, and you'll know.」

...

In the Lesser Werewolf spawn area near Tellak town, a group of players was in the middle of combat. At the front of the group amongst those players was Sleepy Fox. He turned to the Warrior nearby and said, “Hold the line for a moment!” before retreating from the fight.

“Alright!”

As he retreated, several spells whizzed past him and blasted the Lesser Werewolves behind him.

He was currently in the middle of levelling. For Dusk to dare disturb him at this point in time, it would definitely be an important matter. He opened up the video and pressed play and was surprised to discover the person in this video was Nie Yan. His interest was now piqued; thus, he continued to watch. While he observed Nie Yan and the others killing the mobs, he furrowed his brows. This is Treant Forest, right? Why do the Treants have such high health? He was quite knowledgeable in the game. With but a glance, he was easily able to spot something strange about this video.

They’re running the dungeon on Specialist!

「Treant Forest on Specialist... Did you guys actually clear it?」 Sleepy Fox sent a message to Dusk. He was shocked; however, he soon regained his wits. Such crappy equipment and their team still dare to enter a Specialist dungeon? Quite a rare sight indeed...

Chapter 58 – Clever Use Of The Featherfall Jewel

「We did clear it,」Dusk replied a moment later.

“His skills with the crossbow are amazing!” Sleepy Fox exclaimed in admiration. He was on the part of the video where Nie Yan first began luring the Treants with the crossbow. Even if one had exceptional skills, accurately firing those three bolts in such a short time frame and under such pressure was nearly an impossible feat. Nie Yan’s skills were beyond exceptional.

The players at present had just entered the game, so in regards to skill, they were a far distance away from Nie Yan. These three bolts might be nothing more than a common everyday skill in his former timeline. However, in the eyes of Sleepy Fox, Dusk, and the others, it was no different from the skills of a god!

Sleepy Fox had never valued or noticed the importance of a Thief during a dungeon run. After all, many teams who lacked one still managed to clear dungeons just fine. Therefore he never attached any importance to what Nie Yan could do as a Thief when he invited him. Though at present, he began to think having a good Thief in a dungeon expedition team was somewhat of a significant matter!

He had always felt the team was lacking a certain something yet only now did he realize what it was. What they were lacking was exactly an expert-level Thief like Nie Yan!

「Stone was correct. He really is an expert,」Dusk said. Stone's judgement had always been somewhat lackluster, yet this time around... They didn't know how or what, though a good analogy would probably be something like a disabled cat finding a dead mouse, but he somehow managed to invite a godly expert to their team.

「We should be able to clear Agmota Muddy Swamplands now.」After finishing the video, he understood the phrase, “A successful Thief can increase the team's survival by thirty percent or higher,” slightly better. This line didn't only apply to three-player parties nor only five-player parties, it meant the same with twenty-player and even thirty-player teams as well!

Besides his individual skill, Nie Yan's leadership abilities were certainly commendable too. Were it not for him, Yu Lan and the others would have found it impossible to pass the dungeon because of their sub-par equipment.

The moment Nie Yan found out Dusk was part of Holy Empire, he knew the progression of the run would be seen by Sleepy Fox. Therefore the least he could do was to eliminate some of the doubts in Sleepy Fox's mind.

Now that the Featherfall Jewel was in his hands, Nie Yan was reminded of a famous Elite Monster, Gato the Lion King. He still needed to make quite a few preparations if he wanted to get rid of that overgrown feline.

Nie Yan took a stroll around the auction house. Since the demand and selling price of Black Phenol wasn't bad, many Alchemists

gathered whatever leftover ingredients they had and concocted it into Black Phenol to put up on the auction house. At the moment, there were a little over a hundred bottles and several dozen recipes for sale. In but a few days the value of these items would soar considerably. However, a few days hadn't arrived yet so Nie Yan pressed purchase without the slightest hesitation and cleaned the entire auction house out of all its Black Phenol, Black Phenol Recipes, and even the ingredients used to create Black Phenol.

After purchasing all of the [Black Phenol and Black Phenol related items](#), Nie Yan sorted by price and bought nine of the most expensive crossbow quivers up for sale: two thousand Blackgold Bolts, three thousand Nightmare Bolts, and four thousand Tempered Poison Bolts.

Blackgold Quiver (1000 bolts): Damage +12 | Price: 2 silver

Nightmare Quiver (1000 bolts): Damage +10 | Price: 1 Silver, 50 copper

Tempered Poison Quiver (1000 bolts): Damage +9 | Price: 1 Silver, 10 copper

These bolts cost Nie Yan a pretty penny. Besides a few players from the larger guilds who were in charge of luring monsters, absolutely no one could bare to use these expensive bolts. Truthfully, even those wealthy guilds would find it a bit too wasteful squandering these bolts on luring monsters. Therefore the demand for these types of bolts wasn't much at all. However, their prices still remained high because they were relatively uncommon. Hence only ridiculously rich players like Nie Yan

would purchase these things.

After purchasing the quivers, Nie Yan teleported to Mordor using the transport point and headed off in the direction of Violet Dream Hills.

He went past the town walls and travelled north for roughly ten or so kilometers before encountering an unbroken chain of mountains. Arriving at the base of one of these mountains, he ran up the path leading to the mountain peak. Upon reaching the peak, he gazed far into the distance and saw an open plain. Due to how high up he was, everything on this plain looked extremely small. He then looked at the landscape directly beneath him which was nothing but desolate terrain.

Standing atop the peak where the wind whistled through the air, he observed the forest of conifers that ran along the mountain range; the trees flowed like the waves in an ocean of green.

The peak he stood atop of was roughly several hundred meters above ground. For the average player, it would mean certain death if they tried to jump off this peak.

Nie Yan paced back and forth around the peak, occasionally glancing down to examine the landscape directly below. However, he halted upon finding a certain tree situated near the peak's edge.

He stood directly under this tree and faced east. One step, two step, three step... This should roughly be it.

Yep, it's right here. There's no mistaking it. Nie Yan then leaped off the mountain peak.

Though his actions stated otherwise, the purpose of making this trip really wasn't so he could commit suicide. It was because the lair of the Level 7 Elite monster, Gato the Lion King, was located beneath this cliffside. This monster was the field boss who ruled over this desolate terrain, and many unsuspecting players who came to this area to train would find themselves killed by this mighty lion.

Gato would respawn within a day if he was killed. Moreover, he had a high probability of dropping the Blackblood Set which consisted of three items: cloak, gloves, and shoulder guards. At Level 5 Silver-grade, the set was currently the best Thief equipment sets in the game, coming second to the Covenant Set which could only be found in the yet-to-be-opened Sosil Valley dungeon. By obtaining the Blackblood set, Nie Yan could at least guarantee that he was fully geared in first-rate equipment. Beside the aforementioned set, Gato also dropped various Thief skill books.

In Nie Yan's previous life, many players gathered here to hunt Gato the Lion King. Plenty of chaotic battles occurred for the sake of snatching the equipment he dropped. Often times a large expanse of players covered the entire area, so wanting to grab the Blackblood set wasn't a simple matter. While trying to complete the set was even more of an ordeal. This was due to the fact that Gato would also spawn several hundred Lions with him each time he respawned. Therefore players needed to clear the surroundings of Lions before facing off against the boss safely. However, the numerous ordinary Level 7 Lions were extremely difficult to deal

with as well.

The player base at present was too low level. At the very least, it would take twenty-five Level 5 or higher players to hunt Gato. However those sort of players were few and far between. Moreover, those who were at that level were certainly experts as well. In any case, gathering so many top ranked players together certainly wouldn't be easy.

Let alone Gato, players didn't even dare to come to this area to hunt the ordinary Lions. This vicinity was a Level 7 monster spawn area so very few people would come. Even if they did, none of them would be able to reach the Gato's lair. This was the reason Nie Yan could feel at ease while carrying out his plan.

The wind blew past his hair as he continued descending in altitude. When Nie Yan reached four fifths of the way to the ground, he activated the Featherfall Jewel's skill, whereupon he immediately began slowing down. He felt like he was as light as a feather as his speed slowed down to a steady rate.

Under the effect of Featherfall, Nie Yan's falling speed was only somewhat faster than the actual falling speed of a feather.

The distance between him and the ground grew increasingly short. He estimated his current altitude at about twenty meters above ground. He shot out a web line from his Ring of Woven Silk which stuck to the rock face and stopped his fall. Now suspended in the middle of the air, he looked below to discover a robust brown Lion with a large mane of hair and an imposing royal aura.

By coincidence, this Lion was also within his firing range.

Obviously, this was Gato the Lion King. Nie Yan recalled this was the exact location where he spawned.

Perfect. The web line connected to Nie Yan's left hand was firmly secured on the vegetation growing on the rock wall above. His right hand reached into his bag and took out a crossbow. He lined the sights on the Lion...「Whoosh! Whoosh! Whoosh!」The bolts shot out of the crossbow and went in a straight line towards Gato.

Chapter 59 – Gato The Lion King

Since the majority of the player base was too low level, very few players were able to reach this destination, which led Nie Yan to believe his actions were far from prying eyes.

However unbeknownst to him, in an area not far from the cliff face he overhung, a group of ten or so players were hunting mobs. The strongest among them reached Level 6 while the lowest was Level 4. Even their highest level member was still a level lower than these Lions, thus none of them dared to penetrate too deeply into Violet Dream Hills.

Although they received three hundred percent bonus experience for killing these Level 7 Lions, it was offset by their numbers. Moreover, their expenditure was too great. In the game's current state, even a single Basic Health Potion was an expensive luxury. Yet they were consuming these potions at a ludicrous rate. Were it not for the fact that their profits were somewhat decent after recently picking up a Leo Shield and a few fur pelts, they would have long stopped hunting these high health hard-to-chew monsters.

“Bladelight, let's leave after another hour or two. We should have enough Lion Pelts by then,” said the Priest to the Level 6 Fighter at the front of the group.

The Fighter named Bladelight raised his shield and blocked an incoming Lion's attack. Brandishing his sword, he countered with Heroic Strike and [kited](#) the Lion as the Mages whittled its health away. Once its health fell below a certain point, he finished it off

with Whirlwind Slash.

“Alright, we’ll leave in an hour then. Since we’ve already got a Leo Shield, it’d be perfect if the Leo Armour dropped as well,” Resplendent Bladelight nodded and replied. He unhurriedly collected the items that dropped from the monster’s corpse.

“That’s impossible. I read online that the drop rate for Leo Armour is one in five hundred,” said an Elementalist who walked to his side. He and Resplendent Bladelight were the only Level 6s in their team.

His was named Hei Zhuo (Black Amazing). The two of them could be counted as experts in the game. Although they were friends, neither was willing to admit they were weaker than the other. In terms of skill, Bladelight was superior but Hei Zhuo’s influence in their guild was higher. Their guild was named Unhindered and was established using both of their names. Since Bladelight wasn’t interested in the management aspects of the team or guild, Hei Zhuo naturally took on this role. Under his leadership, not only did Unhindered become a successful guild, it became somewhat famous as well.

“What? The Leo Shield’s drop rate is only one in a thousand yet we still managed to get one anyway.” Bladelight rebuked.

“That’s only cause you got lucky...” Hei Zhuo’s complexion paled. Bladelight’s tone made him somewhat speechless and angry; however, he still managed to mumble out a few words in reply.

“If I can equip the Leo Armour, I’ll have the highest defense out of any player in the game!” Bladelight said in a confident tone.

Egotistical prick... Hei Zhuo thought in disdain. His expression, however, did not betray his inner thoughts.

He and Bladelight, on various occasions, competed in sparring matches in the arena, though the difference between them was clear. Out of ten matches, it’d be considered amazing if he could even beat Bladelight in two of them.

Bladelight was famous, quite skilled, and he was well-respected among players in several professions. In truth, Unhindered was established solely on his reputation alone. Thus, Hei Zhuo had no choice but to rely on Bladelight. However, as the guild continued to expand, Hei Zhuo’s authority over it grew as well. As a result, he was slowly inching out Bladelight in terms of position within the guild.

As he and his team prepared to continue their hunt, Bladelight happened to gaze over at the distant cliff face and was surprised to discover a player jumping off its peak. Jeez... I’m seeing stranger things by the day. People are even committing suicide in video games. Can’t this guy be a little less morbid? However, to his astonishment, that player’s falling speed continued to decrease, to the extent where they were unlikely to die even if they hit the ground.

“Guys, look at the cliff face over there!” Bladelight exclaimed in an amazed manner.

“Hmmm, why?” Hei Zhuo asked as he inadvertently looked to the side, whereupon his expression immediately froze. He also noticed Nie Yan. At that moment, he saw Nie Yan shoot out something from his hand and suspend himself in midair, whereupon he took out a crossbow and began firing below.

“What the heck is doing?” The surrounding members stared blankly.

“Amazing, this guy can even think of a strategy like this! Haven’t you guys figured it out? He’s killing monsters!” Bladelight straightened his back and replied. The player overhanging this cliff deeply interested him. For being able to figure out such a unique method of killing mobs, this certainly wasn’t an average player.

“That item on his hand should be the Ring of Woven Silk!” Hei Zhuo recognized this item because he was knowledgeable of most equipment in the game.

“If we also had this Ring of Woven Silk, could we also be like him and hunt monsters like that?”

“No, even if we had that ring, we still wouldn’t be able to. Unless we have equipment with the Featherfall ability like him, the force of the fall would likely snap the web line,” Bladelight replied. The Ring of Woven Silk was already quite a rare accessory that held considerable value. There was even less of a need to discuss equipment with the Featherfall ability which happened to be rarer. These two unique items couldn’t necessarily be bought even if one

did have the money. Yet for the sake of hunting monsters, this person obtained both? Just who the hell was he?

“Damn! I’d like to be able to kill monsters like that. If I never have to worry about being attacked while firing bolts, I’d be able to rise several levels in no time!”

“Not necessarily. The number of mobs in his range is limited. His levelling speed won’t be that high because the mobs don’t respawn fast enough at the rate he’s killing them. After clearing all the mobs in his range, he’ll have no choice but to go back,” a somewhat knowledgeable member of the team voiced their opinion.

Hei Zhuo didn’t utter a single word while listening to his teammate’s discussion. They couldn’t penetrate too deeply into the area because the nearer they approached that cliff, the higher the mob density. Since they didn’t dare to get anywhere near that area, they would never know what sort of monsters that player was hunting.

“ROAAAR” The deafening sound travelled all the way from the cliff face to where they were standing. The surrounding members paled as they all looked on in horror.

A robust Lion leapt five meters into the air and threw itself at the cliff face. The pounce was quite powerful and ferocious, even managing to shake the cliff face on impact. Yet no matter how high that Lion leapt, it was far from being able to reach Nie Yan. Its body halted on the cliff face and involuntarily slid off. All the while, Nie Yan dangled calmly in midair and steadily fired more

bolts.

“It’s the Elite-class monster, Gato the Lion King!” Hei Zhuo shouted, his voice cracking in astonishment.

Each member of the group looked at each other in dismay and shock. Gato the Lion King, even if they were to form a twenty-player team right now, they still wouldn’t be able to kill this Lion. Yet this Level 7 Elite-class monster was currently being turned into a pin cushion as it was slowly shot to death by a single player overhanging a cliff. When they thought of this, they felt resentment boiling up inside of them, perhaps even more so a feeling of envy and jealousy.

“Can we rush in and steal the equipment from him after he kills it?” one of the members asked.

“Impossible. We simply don’t have any means of going there, unless Guild Leader Hei Zhuo can call a bunch of people over here. However, the losses we would suffer far outweigh our potential gains.”

“Ah... Forget it then.”

As Bladelight, Hei Zhuo, and the others contemplated, the earth violently trembled. The vibrations they felt on the ground resembled a stampede. Each of their faces paled, and they quickly looked into the distance. What they saw was a giant dust cloud rising into the air and several hundred Lions running in their direction. The Lion King’s roar had stirred up the Lions in the

vicinity!

“We’re done for! Everyone, retreat immediately!” Hei Zhuo shouted in alarm, but it was already too late. The stampede of Lions had discovered their presence. At that moment, they were simply awaiting their impending doom.

Bladelight realized how difficult it would be to escape, so he raised his shield to welcome the enemies.

Meanwhile, the perpetrator of this disaster was hanging leisurely over the cliff face. He didn’t need to expend much strength. All he needed to do was steadily fire his crossbow. The bolts that were fired all had the additional property of dealing bonus on-hit damage. Even if it was the Level 7 Lion King, it still had no more than five or six thousand health. Under his steady fire, it soon had less than half of its health remaining.

The Lion King’s aggro was fully on Nie Yan but it was incapable of attacking him. Thus, there was nothing it could do. Since it only knew physical attacks, all of its abilities were related to raising its physical damage. Even when it leapt at its highest, it only reached six or seven meters while its opponent was suspended twenty meters in the air.

Killing monsters that surpassed him in level became much simpler with these bolts that dealt bonus on-hit damage. Each and every bolt would deal real and genuine damage.

Chapter 60 – Resplendent Bladelight

Nie Yan specifically chose this location after making certain the Lion King didn't have any ranged attacks. Gato was the boss that resided at this cliff base, and Nie Yan recalled there were at least ten other monsters like him. However, Gato happened to be the easiest one to deal with because it only knew physical attacks. Naturally, Nie Yan would choose to challenge the pushover over the others.

The Lion King tried every which way to get its claws on Nie Yan. However, as time elapsed, its health eventually fell below twenty percent, and it entered a berserk state. Its robust and muscular body, though weakened, suddenly filled with energy and unyieldingly pounced at Nie Yan. However, no matter how hard it struggled, all of its efforts were futile in the end.

Before another half hour even passed, its health bar fell empty. The Lion King raised its head to the sky and resentfully roared, unwilling to resign to its fate, before collapsing onto the earth.

Gato the Lion King, the boss that would be fought over by numerous players in the future, had its life ended just like that. Nie Yan hadn't lost a single drop of health in the process of whittling it to death.

「Ding!」A clear melody rang into the air. He received eight hundred percent bonus experience for killing a monster that surpassed him in level. After hitting Level 5, his experience bar continued filling up and only stopped upon hitting thirty-six percent.

The Lion King had dropped two pieces of equipment. Both items lay sparkling on the ground beside Gato's corpse.

Equipment dropped! Excitement arose within Nie Yan; however, he still couldn't come down.

He could see ten or so Lions still roaming around in an area not far from Gato's corpse. In order to retrieve the dropped items safely, he needed to clear them out first. Thus, he continued firing the crossbow until each Lion was shot to death.

Unlike other games, dropped items never disappeared after a certain amount of time. The game resembled real life as in items thrown on the ground would never just disappear out of thin air. As for items players didn't need or couldn't sell, they could be broken down into raw materials by the Recycler to recoup some of their value.

Seeing as there were no monsters left in the area, Nie Yan released the web line and dropped to the ground. After falling twenty meters, he only lost sixty health. This sort of height wasn't enough to kill him with fall damage.

Nie Yan walked up to the Lion King's side and collected the two pieces of equipment that dropped. Since both items were unappraised, he revealed their properties with Transcendent Insight.

Blackblood Cloak (Gold)

Level Requirement: 5

Properties: Defense 19–21, Resilience +5, Mov. Speed +6

Weight: 2 lb

User Restriction: Thief; can be equipped by all factions.

Lion King's Shield (Gold)

Level Requirement: 5

Properties: Defense 39–51, Block Chance +12%, Resilience +5, Magic Resist +7

Weight: 10 lb

User Restriction: Fighter, Paladin; can be equipped by all factions.

Nie Yan felt quite satisfied when he saw that a piece of equipment from the Blackblood set had dropped, though he didn't expect the Lion King's Shield to drop as well. Its value was much higher than the Blackblood Cloak! To illustrate a point, if he brought it to the marketplace, he absolutely wouldn't sell it for anything less than twenty silvers. In the best case scenario, he could exchange it for a couple pieces of Thief equipment.

The price for a Fighter's shield remained high in the marketplace, always occupying the top positions in terms of price. Out of the ten most expensive equipment sold in the marketplace, eight were Fighter shields.

What a good piece of equipment! Along with the Blackblood Cloak, I've made a decent profit. Nie Yan stored the shield and cloak into his bag.

I'm finally Level 5... Nie Yan glanced at his stat page. Due to the [Chapter of Courage's effect](#), he gained two additional stat points and one additional skill point upon reaching Level 5, meaning he had a total of seven stat points and two skill points to allocate. He allocated two points in Strength and five in Dexterity. Since Intermediate Marksmen couldn't be improved any further at his current level, he distributed his two skill points into Dagger and Dual Wielding. As a result, he gained a ten percent attack bonus along with increased proficiency in wielding daggers. Moreover, he could at long last dual wield weapons.

Nie Yan brought out all the Level 5 equipment he had been carrying with him just for this occasion. After switching out all his Level 0 equipment, he glanced at his character info.

Main Weapon: Horn Dagger (Bronze)

Secondary Weapon: Assassin's Decree (Gold)

Armour: Headhunter's Silver Leather Armour (Silver)

Cape: Blackblood Cloak (Gold)

Boots: Boots of Swiftiness (Gold)

Nie Yan's upgraded equipment drastically changed his appearance. The Headhunter's Silver Leather Armour, with its dull silver-white lustre, gave off a chilly aura of slaughter and death. From his back hung a dark, blood-red cloak that emitted a faint golden glow. In addition, the pair of daggers he held in his hands flickered with a cold glint. The style of Thief equipment was generally reserved compared to other professions, and Nie Yan had also concealed the equipment's visual effects, but from a quick

glimpse, one could still discern that his equipment was out of the ordinary.

Nie Yan became much faster with his Level 5 equipment. He moved like the wind, leaving afterimages behind him.

“Not bad,” he muttered to himself. He felt quite satisfied with his new equipment.

In this period of time where good equipment was still scarce, his own equipment would cause the overwhelming majority of players to look at him in admiration.

This new equipment would enable him to freely roam around any Level 6 or 7 monster area as he pleased.

Nie Yan would need to wait a day for Gato to respawn, so he began heading out of Violet Dream Hills. His next objective was the Level 8 Elite-class monster Ogre Devourer, who resided in an area not far from this one. The loot the Ogre Devourer dropped was also rather decent, as it dropped items for every profession. In his past life, there was even a player who'd obtained a piece of Dark Gold Thief equipment. Of course, the drop rate for equipment of this grade was extremely low. The Ogre Devourer was also a monster that took a day to respawn.

Nie Yan made sure to carefully avoid the Lions as he left the area. Moving forward, he heard a rustling sound coming from a nearby bush. Nie Yan looked over just in time to see a Fighter clad in white armour with an ashen silver greatshield in his hand leap out of the

bush and come running in his direction. Just moments later, three Lions also emerged from the bush and pounced after the Fighter.

That Fighter's footsteps were steady and unhurried. However, his situation was a little unfavourable, as his health was running low and the Lions' attacks became increasingly ferocious.

Intimidate!

The Fighter's sudden and explosive roar startled the Lions and halted their movements for a brief moment. Taking advantage of this small opening, he followed with Tendon Break and targeted the closest of the three Lions before rapidly pulling back.

The Lion struck by Tendon Break temporarily entered a crippled state. The two other Lions fiercely growled and leapt into the air, pouncing on the Fighter.

The Fighter retaliated with Heroic Strike, striking one of the Lions and repelling it. He then firmly raised his shield to meet the other Lion's attack. Even for a Level 6 Fighter, it was still quite difficult to deal with three Level 7 Lions while low on health.

Nie Yan had activated Stealth the moment the Fighter appeared and blended in the background. Instead of leaving, he idled around the Fighter.

If Nie Yan were to take advantage of the situation and act, the Fighter would undoubtedly die. However, he still held some

reservations. Judging by the other party's firm and collected movements, he could tell with a single glance they were an expert. He was currently contemplating whether it was worth becoming enemies with this expert over a single piece of equipment. In the end, he decided it was best to wait for the three Lions to kill this expert first. After all, when two sides fought, it would always be the third party that benefited the most.

As for saving this person, Nie Yan had no interest in such an idea. He had been in too many situations where the person he saved repaid his kindness with malice. In this world, everyone fought for their own interests, so it was necessary for him to learn how to be cold-hearted.

Since this person dared to come to this area, they were presumably not weak. Nie Yan examined this Fighter with Transcendent Insight.

Resplendent Bladelight

Level 6 Fighter

Nie Yan's raised an eyebrow after reading this player's name. He knew almost all the players who rose to fame in Calore, even if they held just a little bit of reputation. Naturally, this Resplendent Bladelight was no exception.

Chapter 61 – Favour

“How could it be him...?” Nie Yan muttered to himself. Though he had no relation with Resplendent Bladelight, he still recognized this name because it was quite influential in his past life. Ranked as one of the top three Fighters in the game, Bladelight held impressive renown. His strength couldn’t be judged by rankings as the order frequently changed. Therefore, others found it difficult to decide the one truly ranked first among them. Nonetheless, Bladelight was still a famous personality and Nie Yan had heard of his name.

Now that Nie Yan thought about it, he seemed to recall there was a story surrounding Resplendent Bladelight. It was about one of his friends, an Elementalist named Hei Zhuo (Black Amazing). The two, who jointly established a guild named Unhindered, were considered the closest of friends. However, Bladelight didn’t care much for managing Unhindered, so full authority over the guild eventually fell to Hei Zhuo. Later on, Bladelight found out his girlfriend was having an affair with Hei Zhuo while he, of course, had absolutely no clue this had been occurring. He was a proud and arrogant person, so how could he bear this sort of humiliation? In retaliation, he brought many of his brothers away and left the guild. From then on, Unhindered separated into two factions with irreconcilable differences. As for what happened after... Bladelight could be considered a hero of sorts—he kept to his promises, valued loyalty, and was well respected among other players. Moreover, no one disputed his position as one of the top three Fighters in the game. Hence, without Bladelight, Unhindered went on a continual decline and eventually degenerated into a second-rate guild.

As Bladelight resisted the three Lions, he felt a cold chill run

down his spine and a peculiar sensation arose in his heart. He steadily retreated as he fought, occasionally glancing behind to look around, yet he saw nothing but empty space.

However, his instincts would never betray him. He knew this odd feeling came from the gaze of a Thief.

Even with six points in Awareness, he was still unable to locate the other party's position. This isn't an ordinary Thief!

“Brother, since you're already here, why don't you show yourself? My name is Resplendent Bladelight. If you've decided to attack, I won't attempt to struggle since I'm done for in any case. However, if you're willing to save me, you'll have my thanks. In addition, I'll even swear on my name that I'll remember this favour.” Bladelight spoke in a clear tone. At the same moment, the Lion that had been left behind recovered from its crippled state and joined back with its two companions. All three pounced forward and intensified their assault.

Hoh? I didn't think he'd be able to notice me. Nie Yan pondered for a short while. He would only obtain a single piece of equipment if he killed Bladelight. The equipment he'd acquire wasn't for his profession and its value wasn't something he highly regarded. In contrast, being owed a favour by a first-class Fighter held much greater appeal than a single piece of equipment. Moreover, from his previous life, he knew Bladelight was known for being a trustworthy person.

The lights and shadows in the background blurred, followed by a figure emerging into sight roughly three meters from Bladelight.

Nie Yan had emerged! He lowered his body and swiftly struck one of the Lions with a sweeping kick.

Concussive Blow!

The blade of his daggers flashed with a cold glint. Among the three Lions, the one he struck with Concussive Blow was low on health. Nie Yan chained his prior attack with Assassinate followed by Vital Strike and instantly killed the Lion, whereupon he drew back immediately and pulled out a crossbow.「Whoosh! Whoosh! Whoosh!」Three bolts shot out of the crossbow and pierced the air.「Put! Put! Put!」

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Nie Yan's attacks caused the two remaining Lions to switch aggro. They turned around and pounced on him.

Taunt!

Bladelight knew that this moment, his best course of action was to support Nie Yan. His taunt came at just the right time. The Lions stiffened mid-pounce and the aggro switched back to him.

「Whoosh! Whoosh! Whoosh!」Nie Yan fired his crossbow once more and three bolts shot through the air.「Put! Put! Put!」The Lion

that was already low on health from being struck earlier died after the second round of bolts.

Nie Yan withdrew his crossbow and pounced toward the remaining Lion.

Cleave!

Bladelight leapt high into the air and struck the remaining Lion. The attack ensured its attention was fixated fully on him while Nie Yan circled round its back and released a flurry of attacks.

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Thieves dealt thirty percent more damage when attacking an enemy from behind. A brief moment later, the Lion went limp and collapsed to the ground.

Bladelight felt a mix of shock and relief when he saw Nie Yan's nimble movements and high damage. What a strong Thief! Just a moment ago, if he had decided to attack me instead, I'd have zero chance of survival.

Nie Yan walked up to the three Lion Corpses and searched around. To his disappointment, nothing had dropped.

“Well, that’s settled. Too bad nothing dropped. Anyway, if you plan on keeping your promise, this means you owe me one now. My name is Nie Yan (Nirvana Flame),” Nie Yan said, examining Bladelight. He appeared to be near his mid-twenties. He also looked mature and rugged, giving off the impression of someone who could be relied on and trusted.

“I, Resplendent Bladelight, am a man of my word. I’ll remember this favour. In the future, just call if you need me. As long as it’s within my capabilities, I’ll do my best to lend a helping hand,” Bladelight replied in a straightforward manner. He wasn’t the type of person who backed out on his promises.

Bladelight then glanced at Nie Yan’s face and was shocked at his immature appearance. He never thought this Thief would be so young. He only looked to be eighteen or nineteen years old. Moreover, he didn’t think Nie Yan would appear in this area for no rhyme or reason. Presumably, the player he had seen earlier, suspended over the cliff face and shooting the Lion King, was Nie Yan.

“Why did you come here all by yourself?” Nie Yan asked. It was quite dangerous for a lone Fighter to burst into a high-level monster area. Thieves might not have a problem coming here but that was only because they could avoid danger by activating Stealth.

“I entered this area in a party with my friends but we got separated when we met a large group of Lions. I’m the only one remaining; everyone else died. I was constantly fending off those Lions and there was never a chance for me to use a Return Scroll. If

it weren't for my high health and defense, I would've likely died as well," Bladelight replied in a calm manner; however, Nie Yan could imagine how bitter and desperate of a situation he had been in.

"I guess you're lucky then."

"You're right. I am pretty lucky for being able to somehow survive. How about we add each other as friends? Resplendent Bladelight is too much of a mouthful. You can just call me Bladelight."

Nie Yan accepted Bladelight's friend request. His new friend was a powerful Fighter, which was worth being happy over. At least from now on, he'd no longer have to worry about finding a good tank when running a dungeon.

"This isn't a safe place for you to idle around. It's best for you to hurry up and return to town," Nie Yan suggested. If a pride of Lions were to catch sight of them, he could still easily escape, but Bladelight was different. He had no way to hide himself. Moreover, with his large build and bulky equipment, he'd likely become a free meal for the Lions in this area.

For Bladelight, these words weren't pleasant to the ears but he had no means to refute them. Besides the fact Nie Yan seemed to be much stronger than him, Fighters couldn't compete with Thieves when it came down to survivability.

"Alright then, I'll leave. I owe you a favour, so if you ever need

me just send a message. As long as it's within my capabilities, I'll try my best to help!" Bladelight nodded his head and retrieved a Return Scroll from his bag. It really wasn't safe for him to stay here for too long.

"Wait a second!" Nie Yan shouted, stopping Bladelight just when he prepared to activate the scroll. His impression of Bladelight was quite good.

"What's the matter?"

"I have a shield that you might want. I don't mind selling it to you if you can give me a decent price," Nie Yan said. It would be too much of a pity selling this shield through the auction house. If an acquaintance could afford it, he might as well sell it to that acquaintance instead. Either way, by selling the shield, he'd have more money to do other things.

"Huh? Let me take a look at it." Bladelight seemed quite interested. Nie Yan was the person who suspended himself over the cliff face to kill the Lion King. To be able to use such an ingenious method of hunting a boss, he was certain to have good equipment.

Chapter 62 – Ogre

Nie Yan placed the Lion King's Shield inside the trade window.

“This shield should be worth over twenty silvers, but I don't mind selling it for only twenty.”

“T-this... dropped from the Lion King when you killed it?” Bladelight was left shaken after examining the shield's properties. He couldn't even begin to imagine how much better the Lion King's Shield was in comparison to his own. In fact, there really was no comparison; the two weren't even on the same level.

Nie Yan furrowed his brows. How did Bladelight know he killed the Lion King?

Seeing Nie Yan's reaction, Bladelight hurriedly explained, “Oh, my apologies. It seems I got a bit too excited. However, you can rest assured that I won't leak this information.” Then, he returned his gaze to the shield. “This Lion King's Shield really is worth over twenty silvers. If it were to appear in the marketplace, it definitely wouldn't sell for less than twenty-five silvers. Unfortunately, I don't have that kind of money on me right now. Would you be willing to wait for me to scrape up enough funds after returning to the city?”

“Sure. I can wait,” Nie Yan replied, nodding his head.

“Oh! I also have a few pieces of Thief equipment in my personal storage. Several of them are pretty decent, and some of them

should hold your interest. Would you be interested in exchanging them in place of money?" Bladelight asked.

"As long as I can use them, I'm fine with it," Nie Yan replied. He had actually been worrying about being unable to find good Thief equipment, so Bladelight's suggestion came at the perfect moment.

"Ah, alright then. I'll contact you after I collect the money. Please don't sell the shield to anyone before then!" Bladelight felt tense and anxious as he stared the Lion King's shield in Nie Yan's hand.

Nie Yan thought for a moment before he replied, "I'll wait a day. If you're not able to raise enough money by then, I can only look elsewhere to sell." Out of the people he had frequent contact with, only Bai Kaisui (Plain Boiled Water from Yu Lan's (Blue Feather) team was a Fighter. However, it was highly unlikely, if not impossible, that Bai Kaisui could afford the twenty silvers he wanted for the shield. Nie Yan felt a little hesitant, putting the shield up in the auction house. He'd much rather keep the fertile waters flowing in his own fields. After all, it was more beneficial to give such equipment to his acquaintances rather than strangers.

"One day is enough!" Bladelight promptly replied.

He was a straightforward person and didn't haggle over the shield's price because he understood he had already received a great bargain. Normally, if it was sold to someone else, such a shield wouldn't sell for any bid less than twenty-five silvers. For it to sell for thirty silvers or higher was a reasonable albeit unlikely possibility as well. Nevertheless, twenty silvers was still a significant sum. Hah... Seems that I'll have to borrow some

money.

Filled with excitement and anticipation, Bladelight activated the Return Scroll so he could raise the funds he needed in the city.

“Oh, there’s one other matter. Is Hei Zhuo (Black Amazing) your friend?” Nie Yan asked. After thinking it over, he still felt it was best to warn Bladelight. The type of people he detested the most were two-faced backstabbers. Hei Zhuo and Bladelight were friends. Yet the former still chose to have an affair with the latter’s girlfriend. This sort of behavior... Nie Yan truly found it condemnable.

“Yes, he is. How did you know?” Bladelight asked, a hint of bewilderment mixed in his tone.

“I’ve heard many unpleasant rumours surrounding what kind of person he is. A little incident happened between him and one of my friends. My friend met him and a woman called Zhi Ya (Beautiful Angelica) at Midnight Charm at Calore, and they got into a scuffle.” Nie Yan glimpsed at Bladelight expression. In his previous life, this bar was where Bladelight discovered his girlfriend and Hei Zhuo were committing acts of adultery. Nie Yan didn’t mind exposing Hei Zhuo’s deeds at an earlier date.

Sure enough, after listening to Nie Yan’s words, Bladelight’s complexion slightly paled.

Zhi Yan was his girlfriend whom he met online. Later on, they met each other in real life and had been living together since. If she

and Hei Zhuo really were committing indecent acts within the game, it would truly be difficult for him to find out.

Hei Zhuo and Zhi Yan were the most trusted people in his life. He didn't believe this was true... No, he wasn't willing to believe it could be true. Yet, deep in his heart, he felt a hint of uncertainty and restlessness.

Could it be what he's saying is actually...? No... Bladelight shook his head. It's absolutely impossible.

"If I ever meet Hei Zhuo, it won't be on friendly terms. Of course, it'll have nothing to do with you." Nie Yan was only warning him out of the kindness of his heart. Regardless, he wasn't the one being cuckolded. "If there comes a day where you plan on leaving Unhindered, come and find me. I'd be happy to have you by my side." Nie Yan said all that he wanted to say; he turned around and began walking into the distance.

"I'll never leave Unhindered," Bladelight coldly replied. He convinced himself Nie Yan was just another one of those people trying to poach members for their guild.

Truthfully, Nie Yan really did have the intention of recruiting him. After all, it would be a great boon for him to successfully pull Bladelight to his side. However, this little setback was of no matter. He had never hoped for immediate results. His goal was already accomplished. A seed of doubt had been planted deep within Bladelight's heart. Sooner or later, as it slowly germinated, he would one day at last... catch whiff of what was being done behind his back. And at that moment, once he realized his short-

sightedness, he'd recall Nie Yan's invitation; this much was enough.

Nie Yan didn't bother explaining. He activated stealth and disappeared from Bladelight's view.

For a short while, Bladelight stood there in a daze. Eventually, he unfurled the Return Scroll and activated its magic within. A brilliant light flashed through the surroundings, and he was teleported away.

Nie Yan was currently dashing through Violet Dream Hills. At the base of a mountain in the distance, he could see an enormous tree several dozen meters in height. It would take at least seven full grown men to link their arms around this tree, and its immense treetop resembled a roof blocking out the sun. Such a landmark seemed especially lofty when placed within Violet Dream Hills.

Surrounding this tree was a forest of smaller trees and vegetation. The Ogre Devourer he had been searching for was located here. A Level 8 Elite-class monster: if he and it were to go head-to-head, he'd stand absolutely no chance. However, when it came to hunting monsters, he didn't necessarily need to face this Ogre Devourer in direct combat.

The boss frequently roamed around the vicinity. Therefore there was no set position where it could be found. If one was unlucky or careless, they would end up encountering it by accident. Unlike the Gato the Lion King, the Ogre Devourer wasn't as well-known, and the items it dropped were a bit worse. Add on the fact that its skin was coarse and thick while its health was high, many players

would find it very difficult to deal with. Furthermore, it possessed a skill named Petrifying Gaze which had the effect of paralysis. Average players were advised to keep as far away as possible if they encountered this boss.

Nie Yan neared the giant tree as he passed through some thickets. His Cloaking stat wasn't low. Thus, once he hid in the background, even if he wasn't in Stealth, he wouldn't be so easily discovered by monsters or players.

The wind was surprisingly strong at the base of the mountain, and it carried the faint scent of blood.

Amid the sounds of leaves rustling in the wind, Nie Yan also heard distant footsteps. He hurriedly hid behind a nearby bush and looked towards the origin of the sound. Whereupon, an obese, two-meter-tall, blue-skinned, two-headed ogre entered his vision.

The Ogre wielded a giant wooden club in its hand. Its movements were clumsy and its two heads were looking around endlessly. Only after a long while did they finally start walking again.

With a single glance of its body, Nie Yan could tell this wasn't the Oge Devourer but merely a common Ogre.

Nie Yan didn't have any interest in killing small fry. He took a detour around the Ogre and continued his search. After exploring the area for what seemed like ages, he finally heard the sound of heavy footsteps coming from the depths of the forest.

He could distinguish these Ogres from the sound of their footsteps. The one approaching him definitely wasn't ordinary.

Finally... The Ogre Devourer is coming. Nie Yan dashed towards the immense tree at the end of the forest which was roughly eighty meters away. Near the large tree, there were six other smaller trees. They were also thick and sturdy; roughly two grown men were required for their arms to surround a single tree.

He decided on these several trees as the location for his Ogre hunt.

As he arrived near the source of the sound which also happened to be in the direction of the immense tree, he gradually recalled the incident that prompted him to head to this area. Before he reincarnated, after the servers had been open for over two years, a Level 5 Thief single-handedly killed the Level 8 Elite-class monster, Ogre Devourer. Despite the player base having outgrown this boss, such an unprecedented event had still caused quite a stir.

Chapter 63 – Art Of Weaving

An enormous figure entered Nie Yan's sight after ten or so seconds. It stood at an evident twofold the height of an ordinary Ogre while it spanned a much greater width; this was the Ogre Devourer.

Nie Yan hid behind a tree with one of his knees on the ground. He retrieved his crossbow, holding it up with his left hand while his right gripped the trigger. He gazed forward and aligned the crossbow sight with his target.

A Level 5 Thief had killed the Ogre Devourer with a crossbow by chipping away its health. Nie Yan had to admit... that person must have been quite courageous. Nonetheless, if they were to compare, Nie Yan wouldn't lose to this Thief in any aspect; there was absolutely no doubt he too could accomplish this feat. After all, he was one of the few players who received the title of Shadow Dancer. He reckoned the other Shadow Dancers in his era could do the same.

Nie Yan had a thorough understanding of the process used to whittle the Ogre Devourer to its death. Nevertheless, the execution was still going to be a challenge. In his past life, that Thief had killed the boss without a hitch, but his success was partially attributed to luck.

Through the sight, the figure of the Ogre Devourer drew increasingly near. Nie Yan redirected his aim to a certain area on the boss' chest—its weak point, the heart.

He held his finger on the trigger and prepared to launch a few bolts. However, out of nowhere, two common Ogres entered his line of sight. They were roaming in the vicinity of the boss.

Nie Yan stopped himself from pulling his trigger finger and paused for a moment. Though there was a sudden introduction of two unknown variables, whether they could influence the success of his plan remained to be seen. The Ogres are big and clumsy. I should be fine as long as I don't get hit...

That said, it's still isn't an easy task to shave their health down without receiving any damage.

Raising his crossbow once more, Nie Yan took aim at the Ogre Devourer.「Whoosh! Whoosh! Whoosh!」With the pull of the trigger, three bolts shot out, aimed directly at the Devourer's heart.

The three bolts whistled in the air.

「Put! Put! Put!」As if the bolts had struck thick bark, hard muffled sounds rang out.

Ogre Devourer (Elite): Level 8

Health: 6,000/6,000

Although this boss didn't deal as much damage as the others, it made up for it with high health and thick skin. Either way, the Ogre Devourer certainly wasn't easy pickings.

Due to its strong defense, normal crossbow bolts dealt limited damage. Nie Yan's current attack only enabled him to deal two to three points of damage at most using normal bolts. Fortunately, he had bought those [special bolts](#) which dealt on-hit true damage. One of those bolts would take out at least fifteen health which was quite impressive.

The Ogre Devourer turned around in the direction of its assailant. It lumbered forward and moved towards Nie Yan while brandishing its large wooden club. The Devourer's heavy five-ton body resembled a humanoid fortress as each of its steps caused tremors in the earth.

Seeing that he had successfully aggroed the boss, Nie Yan dashed towards a nearby tree and chose a path with denser vegetation. The Ogre Devourer was awkward and clumsy, and it seemed as if it were running slowly due to its large build. However, its large strides covered quite a bit of distance, and it was actually closing the gap as it chased Nie Yan. The other two Ogres could also be seen following the Ogre Devourer from the rear, though it soon became apparent that they weren't going to catch up. They continued trailing further and further behind.

After running for about fifty meters, Nie Yan deaggroed the Ogre Devourer because it wasn't able to catch him. It turned around and looked as if it wanted to depart.

However, Nie Yan turned around and shot three more bolts at it before dashing off again. After being attacked again, the Ogre Devourer reaggroed onto Nie Yan and chased him with renewed

zeal.

While running, Nie Yan noticed only the Devourer was chasing him. The other two Ogres had long stopped chasing and were now wandering around in a distant area.

Eh? I guess my luck isn't bad. It'll be much easier dealing with the Ogre Devourer alone.

The boss gradually closed the distance, and only twenty meters separated them.

As it chased Nie Yan, the Ogre Devourer began emanating a dangerous aura. Its four eyes suddenly turned red, and its body radiated a scorching light like a cartoon bomb on the verge of exploding.

The two pairs of eyes locked onto Nie Yan.

Petrifying Gaze!

Nie Yan felt his chest tighten when he noticed the Ogre Devourer's abnormal behavior. These types of monsters that could lock the player down were especially terrifying. If one were careless for just a moment, that player would find themselves unable to even budge an inch.

In the same moment the Ogre Devourer used Petrifying Gaze, Nie Yan rolled out of the way and ducked behind a tree.

MISS!

The Ogre Devourer roared in anger when it failed to hit its target. It strode forward and covered a large distance with each step while it charged at Nie Yan. The two Ogres behind it were also alerted. However, after only a few meters, they turned around and began wandering around again.

Nie Yan sucked in a deep breath of air while he hid behind the tree. The information he previously read in a guide was correct! After attacking the Ogre Devourer twice, it would use Petrifying Gaze six seconds later. If a player was struck, they would become frozen for six seconds, incapable of any movement. At present, the only method of dodging Petrifying Gaze was to get behind cover before the skill activated. Furthermore, the player couldn't be a second late.

In the event that the skill hit Nie Yan, the Ogre Devourer would have caught up and smashed him to death with its giant wooden club.

This was the reason why it was considered extremely difficult soloing the Ogre Devourer. Not just anyone could accomplish this task. Even long after the video of it being killed had been published, it still remained as one of the toughest early game bosses to contend against.

「Whoosh! Whoosh! Whoosh!」Nie Yan fired another round of bolts. He nimbly traversed between the trees and fired the

crossbow from time to time.

「Crash! ... Crash! ... Crash!」The Ogre Devourer continued brandishing its club. Each swing proved fruitless since trees were all they struck.

The key point in killing this boss revolved around making sporadic movements while traversing past obstacles. Although its running speed wasn't slow in spite of its immense size, it was rather lacking in agility. An excellent Thief could take advantage of this weakness by circling around several large trees, making it so that the Ogre Devourer would miss its attacks.

However, this strategy was not one that could be pulled off well by anyone. If the player lacked spatial awareness, couldn't properly judge the Ogre Devourer's movements, or carelessly got hit by Petrifying Gaze, they'd likely be sending their lives to the boss.

In order to avoid being caught, the player had to always run in a curve and never in a straight line. They also couldn't stop moving for more than three seconds.

With so many years of combat experience supporting him, many actions became instinctive and ingrained on the deepest level, enabling him to easily fire the crossbow while smoothly navigating the terrain.

Seeing as the Ogre Devourer wasn't too difficult to deal with, Nie Yan felt much more relaxed. His nimble body weaved between the

large trees while he fired the crossbow between the gaps. The boss had no way of dealing with Nie Yan. Unable to figure out how to catch him, its two heads turned in every direction, eventually getting dizzy and confused.

With top-quality gear and ten years of experience, if he couldn't even match that Level 5 Thief in his past life, he shouldn't have even bothered playing this game.

「Put! Put! Put!」

The bolts nailed themselves into the Ogre Devourer's skin. Its health was gradually being chipped away as it repeatedly roared and brandished its club, smashing it at Nie Yan.

「Crash!」The club smacked the large tree. Nie Yan had leapt backwards and avoided the attack. It was unable to harm even a single hair on his body.

Chapter 64 – Slow Death

「Whoosh! Whoosh! Whoosh!」Another three bolts pinned themselves on the Ogre Devourer, eliciting furious roars that brought over two normal Ogres.

Now this was a bit troubling. Nie Yan glimpsed at the Ogre Devourer's health bar—only a third remained after thirty minutes. If he put aside this Sub-Elite monster to deal with the normal Ogres, its health would return to full, and his work would go to waste. Whatever! Finish it off first!

Nie Yan accelerated his rate of fire as the two normal Ogres joined into the battlefield. The pressure he felt rose precipitously.

There was no end to the three monsters' pursuit. They made attempts to surround and kill him, but they underestimated his agility. He was as slippery as a loach; through the gaps between several large trees, he shot bolts that seemingly came from nowhere.

An enraged roar came from the Ogre Devourer's throat, and it swung its enormous club at Nie Yan—but the swipe could not reach him. The two normal Ogres weren't of any help to the Ogre Devourer either due to Nie Yan's meticulous pathing. Not only that, they even became obstructions. Every time it attempted to move, there were two Ogres blocking its way like brainless pigs.

Nie Yan was unperturbed by his perilous surroundings. When he prepared to fire another round of bolts between the trees with one

knee on the ground, the Ogre Devourer's eyes suddenly emitted another dark-red light.

Shit, it's Petrifying Gaze again!

Nie Yan put away his crossbow and rolled under the cover of the trees.

MISS!

Nie Yan now had a greater understanding of Petrifying Gaze after successfully avoiding the skill three times—he'd be able to dodge so long as he hid behind a tree when it started casting.

Before he even found his footing, however, a massive shadow loomed from above. An Ogre had circled behind Nie Yan, avoiding his detection entirely, and its enormous club strewn with nails smashed down.

Nie Yan didn't have the slightest thought of staying still; he threw himself forward, out of the club's range of attack.

「Boom!」

The impact left a small pit and sent fragments of stone and dirt into the air.

Nie Yan had no issues imagining his fate if he had delayed by

even a second.

The knockback effect from the Ogre Devourer's attack would have sent him flying.

Disastrous consequences would occur during the two seconds it'd take to travel through the air, fall to the ground, and climb back up.

Nie Yan regained his stability, but much to his surprise, he had been surrounded by the three Ogres during that time. With their clubs raised high into the air, the Ogre Devourer and two normal Ogres approached steadily.

I'm done for. It seems that this is the end of the line. Such an accident was beyond his expectations. He swept his gaze over the surroundings: his path had been completely sealed by several large trees and the three Ogres. There was no escape in sight.

The Ogre Devourer bellowed and a deafening roar reverberated through the forest. It raised his club, then slammed it down at Nie Yan.

Within the blink of an eye, a spiked club covered his entire field of view—he could even see the individual nails embedded in the wood. Nie Yan tried retreating; however, the two Ogres flanked him from behind. His situation couldn't be any direr and his heart felt like it was going to burst out his chest. In the brief moments before his seemingly imminent demise, he happened to notice the branches in the tree above.

They were roughly eight meters from the ground and flourished with leaves of a vibrant green. However ordinary they were, they seemed like an extension of a holy tree.

There! Nie Yan leapt to the side, slipping away from the Ogre Devourer's club. He put full force into his legs and jumped, simultaneously shooting a line of webbing from the Ring of Woven Silk.

The power of his jump brought him three meters in the air, while the Ring of Woven Silk ejected a line of webbing of roughly five meters' length.

The line of webbing shot through the gaps between the leaves and stuck on the branches. He was suspended in the air, but with a nearby foothold, he leapt up again and flew past the Ogre Devourer's head.

「Boom! Boom! Boom!」 Three clubs smashed onto Nie Yan's position, sending dirt and pebbles scattering into the air

However, no blood nor flesh stained the ground.

All three Ogres' attacks struck naught but air and earth; their dazed expressions revealed their confusion.

Upon landing, Nie Yan bolted to build up some distance. He stopped between two trees and knelt. With his right hand

supporting the crossbow and his left finger over the trigger, he shot three bolts.

「Put! Put! Put!」

Although the Ogre Devourer had briefly lost its target, the oncoming attack prompted it to turn its head towards Nie Yan, whereupon it raised its club and charged.

Contrary to expectations, Nie Yan did not stop shooting, even when the Ogre Devourer had approached.

Seeing as the enormous club was about to crush him, Nie Yan didn't dare to hesitate. He rolled to the side and evaded the Ogre Devourer's attack.

Its health had already been dropping quickly, and since Nie Yan now intensified his assault, the Ogre Devourer would soon fall.

Only forty or so health remained. Nie Yan circled to the Ogre Devourer's back and withdrew his crossbow. He unsheathed his dagger and pounced at this Sub-Elite monster.

Vital Strike!

Lacerate!

Taking advantage of the few moments the Ogre Devourer took to

turn its head, Nie Yan's dagger left deep gashes on its back and scarlet blood stained the air and earth.

Nie Yan's new set of equipment raised his attack significantly. In addition to the extra thirty percent given to a Thief when striking monsters from the back, he dealt fairly impressive damage.

As it felt a sharp pain shoot up from its back, the Ogre Devourer waved its club and let out a miserable roar.

Due to his honed reflexes, Nie Yan ducked his head as he could sense an object quickly flying towards his head.「VOOM!」A giant club swiped over his head, only missing by a hair's breadth.

Phew! Too close. He raised his dagger and struck the Ogre Devourer's chest with Assassinate.

At last, the final sliver of its health dwindled away. A short stagger, then its colossal figure collapsed.「BANG!」Dust rose into the air and gently floated amidst the thunderous noise.

From the side, the two remaining Ogres charged towards Nie Yan. He quickly fished the items from the Ogre Devourer's corpse and backed away swiftly before he retrieved his crossbow and fired rapidly while darting between the trees. The normal Ogres' strengths weren't all that noteworthy, nor were their health points even close to the Ogre Devourer's. So, when facing the assault of Nie Yan's fire, they both fell to the ground in quick succession.

The party of Ogres was now dead, finally allowing Nie Yan a brief respite. Another field boss down. If it weren't for such an ingenious method of killing monsters, there was absolutely no chance Nie Yan, with such a great disparity in levels, could have challenged that Sub-Elite monster and come out alive. This was the culmination of countless players' knowledge in his past life.

He glanced at his experience bar—it had risen greatly once again. The Ogre Devourer had thick skin, high health, strong attacks, and a special ability: Petrifying Gaze. As a result of all those factors, the experience it was naturally a generous amount. By killing the Ogre Devourer, Nie Yan received a tenfold experience bonus as a reward—his experience bar rose by thirty-seven percent, and he was now Level 5 with nearly three-fourths of his experience bar filled.

Nie Yan had only killed one Elite monster and one Sub-Elite monster—Gato the Lion King and the Ogre Devourer respectively—yet the amount of experience other players obtained after grinding for several days could not even come close to what he received from those two monsters. His level was rising like a rocket! One would never feel greater satisfaction in grinding normal monsters than killing Elite monsters levels above themselves. Unfortunately, there were quite few Elite creatures that could be killed by using terrain bugs or special techniques, and since Elite monsters had quite a long respawn rate, Nie Yan could only take this slowly.

Chapter 65 – Crossbow Of Blood

Nie Yan would have to wait until tomorrow for Gato the Lion King and the Ogre Devourer to respawn. As for leveling, his speed was already sufficiently quick so there was no need to grind normal monsters. With the time remaining, he could do some small businesses on the side.

The Ogre Devourer dropped a total of two items, both of which were rather decent.

Crossbow of Blood (Gold): Single-handed Crossbow

Level Requirement: 5

Properties: Attack +11, 10% Armour-piercing Effect, Triple-shot.

Shooting Speed: 16, Deviation 3%.

Limitation: None

Staff of Moonlight Worship (Gold)

Level requirement: 5

Properties: Attack 32–38, Level Three Holy Explosion. 20% extra damage against demons.

Limitation: Holy Mages; can only be equipped by a member of the Righteous faction.

Nie Yan had challenged the high-level Elites alone and had successfully defeated them despite the level gap. As such, the chances of receiving additional drops were multiplied and reasonably, the system's rewards were especially munificent. Nie Yan had acquired four Gold-tier equipment by now, and every

single piece was extraordinary—the Crossbow of Blood particularly. It brought a great surprise to him; the 10% armour-piercing effect was fairly decent.

When compared to such a substantially superior crossbow, the one in Nie Yan's current possession was of such a poor quality there was absolutely no need to hesitate in switching. When comparing goods, there would always be one inferior. The crossbow bought from the NPC had finished its quest. It had served well, and its times of glory had now come to an end.

Thus, Nie Yan equipped the Crossbow of Blood. As for the old one, it should still fetch some money on the auction. It had a price tag of thirty-seven copper coins when he bought it, so its resale value should be some dozen copper coins.

Nie Yan returned to Calore, having finished examining the new equipment he acquired. There were quite a few people within the city, but the vast majority of players had gone outside for leveling. The streets were bustling with people, many of whom were visiting Jaden's shop, the high-level Alchemist, on the corner. All players who exhausted their stock of potions when leveling outside had to replenish their supply at that place.

The auction house that sat in the heart of the city teemed with an even greater number of people. On the nearby streets, many players laid out their booths and once in a while, some eye-catching items would appear.

Nie Yan entered the auction house and sold off equipment he no longer had any use for. He also continued buying all available

Black Phenol Formulas, Black Phenol, and the ingredients required. He left nothing unbought. After the opening of the new instance tomorrow, many guilds would go and spearhead the investigation. They would discover, to their amazement, that all traces of the low-priced and relatively unknown Black Phenol had vanished. Alchemists would occasionally produce several bottles of Black Phenol, but they'd be bought before one even had time to blink. As for the Black Phenol Nie Yan collected... they became commodities worth being stockpiled. He could starve the marketplace and slowly rid himself of the Black Phenol and Black Phenol Formulas bit by bit, thus inflating the prices. The larger the development into the new instance, the greater the players' need for Black Phenol, and the easier the prices would rise. He could start by first selling Black Phenol and its ingredients, then he'd sell the formula at the later stages. He could gather a large sum of wealth with a method like this. Other investment options would be considered only after earning the money since he had spent quite a sum purchasing Black Phenol.

As usual, Nie Yan went over to several small towns to collect Bat Teeth. He sold them off and earned thirty or so silver coins. He even bought most of the Bat Teeth on the marketplace, and he was now waiting for players to continue grinding. When they came by more Bat Teeth, he would return.

However, Nie Yan felt slightly puzzled because he hadn't even bought a single Bat Teeth at Link. Odd, as it was one of the larger sources of Bat Teeth.

“Mr. Kade, these are the Bat Teeth you asked for.”

“Sir Nie Yan (Nirvana Flame), I am grateful for your assistance.”

After Nie Yan’s Influence in Calore had been raised, the NPC started using honourifics with him. It was evident as Kade was much more amiable.

He came out of Kade’s store, the high-level Blacksmith. Nie Yan raised his head and saw a Paladin with Silver armour entering with a hammer in his hand.

This person seemed a bit over thirty years old. He was very tall and a bit fat; he had quite a unique appearance.

The Paladin looked at Nie Yan with a cautious gaze. They brushed past each other before the Paladin walked into Blacksmith Kade’s store and went to chat with him.

Nie Yan recalled this person: he was the Paladin who discovered the blacksmith quest in his past life—the person who made over ten gold coins. The person who truly discovered this Bat Teeth quest had arrived, increasing the total number who knew of this money-making method to two.

If there were two people simultaneously collecting Bat Teeth, one would raise the prices to increase competition. The opposing side would raise the prices as well, and it would turn into a repeated back-and-forth situation until the profits became marginal. The players would also begin to suspect whether the Bat Teeth held special uses and thus start holding onto them. Last time, there was a Thief that followed Nie Yan and now, there were a total of two

players buying Bat Teeth for high prices. That would elicit more suspicion and soon, someone would follow that Paladin and Blacksmith Kade would be revealed.

I won't be making much profit off this quest any longer.

But to Nie Yan, Kade's Bat Teeth quest was now dispensable. He had already acquired a sufficient starting capital, and he also had many other methods of making money. This quest was not a necessity for him.

Nie Yan checked his total assets: there were over sixty silver coins in his bag, and there were also large amounts of Black Phenol, its ingredients, and the formulas, all of which were going to inflate exponentially in value.

It was absolutely fine even if he lost this source of income.

Without even realizing it, he arrived at the Alchemist Guild's entrance after finding his way through the crowd. His mind had been wandering about before a vender disrupted his thoughts.

"High-level potion ingredients and a Swift Retreat skill book for Thieves! It's a pretty decent skill book! This brother here, would you like to have a look?" yelled a white-robed Holy Mage. He had laid out a booth at the Alchemist Guild's entrance, and when Nie Yan passed by, his eyes brightened. He decided to draw attention to himself.

The Holy Mage was a shrewd person. With a glimpse, he knew Nie Yan's equipment wasn't common gear and several of them were quite high-quality. This skill book, Swift Retreat, was something good for early-level Thieves. However, it went for a rather expensive price—he demanded a silver.

Obviously, it was tough to find a buyer for such a costly item. If it were put on the auction, he'd likely find someone but he would only receive money and there was even a fee! The reason he chose to set this booth here was because he wanted to trade this skill book for Holy Mage equipment. His chances were greatly increased while people were converging here to form groups for the new instance.

Normal Thieves simply couldn't afford to buy such a skill book. As a result, even though he had been yelling for twenty minutes and there were Thieves who came up to inquire the prices, they all shook their head as they departed. However, the Holy Mage couldn't help but call out for Nie Yan since he appeared rather well-off.

Nie Yan turned his head around and glanced at the Holy Mage. With an ash-black staff in his hand, he was clad in a white mage robe and seemed to be around twenty years of age. With his sharp judgement, Nie Yan instantly recognized his equipment. The robe he wore was called the Holy Walker and the ash-black staff was the Wind of the Fallen Moon. Although these weren't the best equipment at this level, they were still rather decent.

“You're pretty lucky! Swift Retreat dropped for you,” Nie Yan said, faintly smiling. It was a very useful skill.

“Yeah! My luck’s always been good. I have a few friends who were grinding for several days at Holy Canyon, yet they haven’t even gotten anything good. I, on the other hand, just grinded for three hours and this Swift Retreat dropped! Right now, one of these is even more expensive than a Silver-tier equipment on the marketplace!” Nie Yan response to the Holy Mage’s advertisement immediately triggered this chatterbox. He was like a radio that had been turned on!

Chapter 66 – Godslayer of Yore

“The Holy Apostles there have pretty decent drop rates. Have you and your friends gone to the Holy Monastery? Assuming your group cleared that instance, you ought to have more than just the Swift Retreat skill book on you. I’m wondering... do you have the Desperate Strike skill book as well?” Nie Yan asked in a casual tone. Since the other party had Swift Retreat, he might as well try to procure the other skill book he needed.

Hearing Nie Yan mention the Holy Monastery, the Holy Mage was momentarily dazed. He examined Nie Yan from head to toe and shook his head. “No, we’re far from being able to obtain a Desperate Strike skill book. We still haven’t entered because the monsters there are too strong for us. Friend, seeing as your equipment is good, I take it that you’ve cleared dungeons around that level before?”

“No, I’m only slightly knowledgeable. I’ve never gone there myself. Anyway, how much for the skill book?” Although he was disappointed that the other party didn’t have a Desperate Strike skill book, obtaining Swift Retreat wasn’t too bad either.

The Holy Mage felt a little skeptical. Most players who wore such good equipment should have already been through every dungeon at least once. Moreover, as a Thief player, how could Nie Yan have not entered the Holy Monastery? The dungeon was practically brimming with all sorts of Thief items, and it was a location all expert-level Thieves visited at least once.

“I’m looking to trade this skill book for equipment. Elementalist,

Holy Mage, or Paladin equipment; any of those are fine,” the Holy Mage replied. He believed that the Swift Retreat skill book was valuable enough for him to exchange for several pieces of equipment.

Nie Yan made an awkward expression. He had already thrown all the equipment he didn't need into the auction house. The only equipment he had right now was the Staff of Moonlight Worship, but he didn't know if Yao Yao (Dark Mystery) wanted it or not.

“I can still sell to you directly if you don't have equipment. Give me an offer my friend! If it's reasonable, I'll sell it to you. My name is Godslayer of Yore (Past Destroying God). First meetings might be distant, but second encounters will bring us closer! Even if our trade fails, I hope we'll remain on good terms!” After observing Nie Yan's actions, he noticed the other party's calm demeanor. He considered his own judgement to be decent; therefore, he felt Nie Yan was definitely an expert.

Godslayer of Yore...? Of the people he knew, Nie Yan vaguely recalled that he had heard of such a player in the past. Though only slightly famous, Godslayer of Yore was known for having gotten into a conflict with Victorious Return at some point. He and his friends massacred several hundred members of their guild, only to vanish into thin air afterward. Alas, solo players who didn't have strong backings were destined to always be met with setbacks if they tried to take on a guild.

Numerous players had suffered at the hands of Victorious Return, Nie Yan himself being one such person. And perhaps because he felt they had experienced similar fates, he now held a

more favourable impression of Godslayer of Yore. At that point in time, Godslayer of Yore's fame outstripped his by a great margin. He had chosen to fight, unlike Nie Yan and his friends who had no choice but to hole up in the mountain ravines when they were being hunted by Victorious Return. "I'm Nie Yan (Nirvana Flame). Since you want me to make an offer for the skill book... One silver and fifty coppers; how does that sound?" Nie Yan was a rather wealthy and offered such a high price without batting an eye.

No matter how expensive the Swift Retreat skill book became, it certainly wouldn't be worth more than one silver and fifty coppers.

"That's too much, Even this skill book wouldn't be sold at such a high price. It's enough for you to just give me one silver." Godslayer of Yore didn't shy away from Nie Yan's frank and straightforward attitude. Since the other side wanted to befriend him, why shouldn't he reciprocate? Inside the game, having another friend meant having another option. Be it trading equipment or forming a team for a raid, befriending a few more experts would make all these things much easier.

"How many people are in your group?" Nie Yan asked. Since he needed a team to run dungeons, he'd eventually have to find some members to form one. Perhaps he could follow Godslayer of Yore and his friends into a dungeon run.

The game had just recently opened, so the number of players who had fixed teams were quite few. As for experts, they needed to carefully choose the right team before entering any instances or dungeons. However, good teams were hard to come by. Thus,

many of these players who were looking for teams were likely to group together to form one.

Godslayer of Yore's eyes brightened upon hearing Nie Yan's inquiry. "You want to run a dungeon? I have six people on my side. They're all classmates from the same university and decently skilled. We have five players who are Level 4 and one that's Level 6, but he always runs dungeons with other people. However, he'll definitely come with us if we call him since we're all classmates. Our group is divided into one Berserker, three Mages, and two Paladins."

"I might make a team, but I haven't made any plans for now. Depending on the circumstances, we'll see when the time comes," Nie Yan said with a light smile.

"Oh..." Godslayer of Yore felt slightly disappointed, but Nie Yan's answer made more sense after thinking about it. Forming a team wasn't an easy affair. "Our equipment is more than a little lacking. So it'll be somewhat inconvenient for us to run the lower level dungeons just to improve our gear. Not to mention, with the way our group is composed, we often can't find a team to join."

"The equipment isn't a problem. How about this? When I find some more people in the future, I'll come looking for you guys, alright?" Nie Yan replied then sent a friend request to Godslayer of Yore.

"No worries. Just call me whenever you're ready!" Hearing Nie Yan's promise, Godslayer of Yore's heart was filled with expectation.

If he planned on continuing to develop in the future, it was a must that he secured his own team. While finding the right players was a troublesome matter, randomly picking people off the streets would often lead to mixed results. It would be a tragedy if he ended up recruiting a bottom-feeder who didn't put in any effort and impeded the team instead. However, this sort of matter should be set aside for after he formed the team. In any case, even if they were bad eggs, all he needed to do was kick them.

Since Godslayer of Yore insisted, he didn't argue any further and bought the skill book for one silver. Swift Retreat was an escape skill. In other words, it was a skill used in a situation where a player couldn't beat an opponent and chose to run, which was fairly common. Swift Retreat increased a Thief's movement speed by thirty percent for one minute when escaping, enabling them to quickly put some distance between them or even completely escape from the enemy. Occasionally, such skills aided the player in avoiding a calamity.

Nie Yan continued to chat with Godslayer of Yore. In any case, he wasn't in a hurry to level because there were plenty of opportunities out there. It would only be a matter of time before he'd catch up with those top ranked players.

"Where did you guys find so many medicinal plants?" Nie Yan asked. He noticed that the majority of items for sale in Godslayer of Yore's booth were plants.

"We can't help it. Three of the members in our five-player group learned the Gatherer skill. We didn't really train much and picked

herbs instead,” Godslayer of Yore replied and forced out a somewhat helpless smile.

Nie Yan more or less understood what he meant. For players without a guild, if they didn’t improve their Gatherer skill or other side professions, they’d have a difficult time keeping up. Godslayer of Yore being able to equip Holy Walker and Wind of the Fallen Moon meant he was doing well for himself. His equipment was even better than many players who joined guilds.

Nie Yan pondered for a moment. He thought about the people he could call when he wanted to form his own team. There was Tang Yao, Godslayer of Yore, and his five friends. As for a good Fighter, he wasn’t confident that Bladelight would come. However, since he was selling the Lion King’s Shield to Bladelight, the latter was certain to reciprocate this favour by giving him face. Perhaps he could call a few others to join as well. After that, he could recruit a few strangers to fill the remaining spots and form a passable team.

“No wonder you set up next to the Alchemist Guild’s doorway!” Nie Yan laughed. Only Alchemists would want so many medicinal ingredients. “You keep on selling your things then. I’ll be taking my leave. We’ll talk some other time!”

“Alright!” Godslayer of Yore replied.

Chapter 67 – Medicine King

Just as Godslayer of Yore (Past Destroying God) and Nie Yan were saying their goodbyes, two players near the entrance of the Alchemist Guild erupted into a heated argument. One of the quarrelers, a young man who barely looked twenty, wore plain cotton clothing and the Alchemist Guild's badge on his chest. His level was low, so most likely he was only an apprentice in the guild. The other quarreler, an Elementalist who looked to be in his thirties, wore equipment of much higher quality. Tall and robust, he dwarfed his opposition so much that he made the apprentice Alchemist seem like a child.

“The failure in concocting isn't my fault this time!”

“Not your fault? Then are you implying it's mine!?”

“Yes! They set me up to fail when I was concocting!”

“Peh! Our captain provided you with so many ingredients, yet they were all turned into useless garbage by you. We can't even recoup our losses! I heard you got lucky and learned some sort of hidden skill. Good, get lucky and scam out of my sight before I make you eat shit too!” Obscenities and curses poured out of the Elementalist's mouth. The moment he finished speaking, he slapped the apprentice Alchemist in the face and knocked several alchemy tools and other items to the ground.

The slap sent the apprentice Alchemist tumbling down the guild entrance staircase. As he lay sprawled out on the ground, he lifted

his head and hatefully glared at the Elementalist.

“Ahhh!? What the hell are you staring at? You got something to say? Keep staring and I’ll make you eat the dirt even harder! Get lost!” The Elementalist’s eyes bulged out of their sockets as he glared threateningly at the apprentice Alchemist.

The apprentice Alchemist glanced at the Elementalist once more. Eventually, he lowered his eyes and silently collected his tools off the floor.

“Bitch!” The Elementalist stamped on the apprentice Alchemist’s chest and knocked him back to the ground. The apprentice Alchemist didn’t retaliate; he remained taciturn, simply staggering back to his knees and continued picking up his things.

...

“Isn’t he too much of a pushover? Even after being kicked, he didn’t even make a sound!” Godslayer of Yore couldn’t help voicing his opinion. The scene had left a bad taste in his mouth.

“The way he dealt with the situation isn’t wrong. Right now, he probably has no choice but to endure. I believe by the time he rises in standing, it still won’t necessarily be too late for him to retaliate,” Nie Yan said with a peculiar expression in his eye. Despite taking on the abuse, the determination still hadn’t faded from the apprentice Alchemist’s eyes. Those who could patiently endure were especially terrifying.

Godslayer of Yore tilted his head back to look at Nie Yan. The latter's words took him by surprise. Nie Yan was likely someone similar to himself, a person who refused to be on the short end of the stick. If anyone were to offend him, then they would definitely be met with appropriate retaliation. However, Godslayer of Yore suddenly saw Nie Yan's expression change to pleasant surprise. He was gazing at the apprentice Alchemist like he found some kind of treasure.

“So it was him... It really is true; be they enemies or friends, both are bound to be met on a narrow path!” Nie Yan muttered to himself in a low voice. He recognized this apprentice Alchemist, but it wasn't because they were friends. No, rather they were enemies. If things stayed on course, this person would eventually become one of Victorious Return's most faithful dogs. In his original timeline, over a tenth of Victorious Return's various high-level potions, pills, tonics, and other drugs were concocted by this one person; several of which could only be concocted by him.

Nie Yan had suffered heavily due to the oppressive manpower Victorious Return possessed, but those vile concoctions were also one of the factors that led to his many defeats. While in the wilderness, he had once encountered a squadron of Victorious Return members. At that time, he was unaware those players were escorting this Alchemist on a quest, and usually, he and his friends wouldn't be at a disadvantage when facing off against such a group. However, who could have imagined each and every one of those players would take out some crafty, eccentric pill that bolstered their combat power by many fold. So, under the effects of those pills, he and his friends were beaten to a wretched state.

The apprentice Alchemist in front of his eyes was called Bird

Leaves No Eggs. Owing to the fact that his name was unpleasant to the ears, because the “Bird” in his name could also be read as “Penis”, the members of Victorious Return didn’t feel comfortable addressing him directly by name. Thus, they gave him the nickname of Medicine King. This title was rather suitable, considering the numerous contributions his concoctions brought to the guild.

However, at this moment, Bird was merely an apprentice Alchemist. He had just been kicked, both literally and figuratively, out of the Dark Hero guild. In a month’s time, Victorious Return would recruit and attach great importance to him due to their guild leader showing him kindness and recognizing his worth. This was the reason for his unwavering loyalty and dedication to the guild. In other words, he was a person who did have somewhat of a moral compass.

Even if he’s the Medicine King, he’s only an apprentice Alchemist right now... Whether he’ll be worth the investment remains to be seen. Nie Yan pondered for a while. Bird’s success wouldn’t have been possible without Victorious Return’s generous support. They had supplied him with an ample amount of alchemic ingredients and slowly nurtured him until he became the Medicine King in both title and ability, to the extent his name resounded throughout the entire Atlanta continent.

After considering his current financial resources, Nie Yan decided fostering the Medicine King absolutely wouldn’t pose any problems. If he wished to succeed in the future, he needed to slowly build up his influence at present. He wanted to set up his own businesses in the game: an alchemy store, equipment shop, auction house, he couldn’t be lacking in a single one. However,

what he was in most urgent need of was talented people, and fortunately, an opportunity to recruit one such person had presented itself. He felt taking Bird under his wing would undoubtedly be the correct choice.

The Elementalist departed after abusing Bird a few more times, his mouth still spitting out obscenities as he walked away.

While Bird picked up his tools, he lifted his head and coldly swept his gaze over the Elementalist's back.

A few moments later...

“Hey! What was that Elementalist's name?” Nie Yan asked as he walked up to Bird's side. He slightly bent his knees and overlooked Bird who was still tidying up the mess.

“Razor. Why does this concern you?” Bird glanced at Nie Yan.

“It concerns me because it concerns you. Tell me, don't you feel humiliated? Don't you want revenge? However, you're powerless, and those without power are destined to walk down the path of being disdained by others. Follow me, and I can have them see you in a different light. I can make them regret ever offending you with today's actions.”

“Why should I trust you?” Bird replied in a suspicious tone. He raised his head and attentively stared at Nie Yan. He couldn't comprehend Nie Yan's sudden appearance. A stranger had just

walked up to him and wanted to recruit him after a single exchange. Wasn't that a little too conspicuous and bizarre?

“My intuition is telling me you're not some sort of useless waste. After being kicked out of your guild, you probably feel quite resentful, correct? Well... I just wanted to see if you had the determination and ability to change confirm that assessment. Besides, you're broke and have nothing at all. From the moment I approached, I had nothing to gain in scamming you, no?” After Nie Yan finished his speech, he turned around and began walking away.

While he departed, he hiddenly anticipated the moment when Bird would run up from behind and catch up. If this was the Medicine King he knew from the past, then Bird absolutely wouldn't let this opportunity slip by once it presented itself in front of him.

“Wait up!”

Nie Yan faintly smiled.

Bird had resolved himself when he saw Nie Yan depart, his expression betraying the conflicting emotions in his heart. He had just been miserably humiliated and shunned by the Dark Hero guild. This was a disgrace he would never forget. He held an extreme wariness towards Nie Yan, because he wasn't completely clear on the latter's intentions. Moreover, the sudden appearance was rather odd. Despite this, one point remained certain—he was completely broke and penniless. Even his funds in real life were barely enough for him to live for two or three more months before

being kicked out. Those who walked in bare feet didn't fear others in shoes; in other words, he had nothing to lose so he wasn't afraid. So what if he was swindled? What other choice did he have?

Belonging to the lowest rung of society, he was a cockroach who held the will to survive. As long as someone gave him a lifeline to hold onto, he would continue to live on.

Bird struggled back onto his feet and followed Nie Yan from behind.

Godslayer of Yore witnessed all the entire course of events while still sitting beside his items laid on the ground. He stared pensively at the receding silhouette of their backs and felt Nie Yan's ambitions couldn't merely be satisfied by forming a team. However, this was good as well. There would be plenty of shade under a big tree. To elaborate, increased influence also came with increased benefits.

...

"What do you want me to do?" Bird asked, while following Nie Yan from behind. Besides concocting, there was nothing else he was good at. Even then, he would still end up messing up the simplest of recipes when creating medicines. He couldn't count how many materials he ended up squandering. If not, why else would he have been kicked from his guild?

"Naturally, it's still concocting. Out of curiosity, what was that

hidden skill that Elementalist mentioned?” Nie Yan asked, while continuing to walk.

“After successfully concocting a potion, pill, tonic, or other medicines, there’s a two percent chance of strengthening its effects.” Bird quickened his footsteps. As he followed from behind, he didn’t know why but he had a strong premonition, from the moment he decided to chase after Nie Yan, that his destiny had subtly changed. As for what the future held, whether it was good or bad, he didn’t know, but he was sure of one thing... He had already made his choice, and he was going to walk down the path he chose.

Chapter 68 – Medicine King Signs Away His Soul

“Mhmm... Not a bad hidden skill.”

“But what use would it have for me? When I concoct pills, my success rate is only a third of those around me! If someone came looking for me to create a pill, potion, or whatever, it’d only be a fluke if I succeed!”

“Since I took the effort to recruit you, naturally it means I believe in you. If you’re willing to follow me, sign this agreement.” Within the game world of Conviction, any contract was valid as long as it was within the scope of the real world’s laws.

Bird suspiciously glanced at the contract in Nie Yan’s hands before taking it and carefully reading over its contents. As he slowly read the contract, word for word and line by line, he realized the clauses were rather simple. In laymen’s terms, Nie Yan would provide him with the ingredients and materials required for him to train his Alchemy. In exchange, jurisdiction over how his creations—pills, elixirs, tonics, potions, and so on—were used would all be decided by Nie Yan. Moreover, he would receive a thirty percent share if the sales of his concoctions produced a net profit.

The conditions on this contract were roughly the same as the ones given by guilds when they recruited an Alchemist. Although, he could see one key difference: the contract Nie Yan presented him stated a thirty percent cut. In contrast, nearly every guild would only share twenty percent of the revenue at most, even if

the Alchemist was highly valued. In terms of benefits, Nie Yan's terms were much more generous than those guilds. However, nurturing an Alchemist gave rise to enormous expenditures, all of which would be taken on by Nie Yan; the number of responsibilities he needed to assume were staggering.

"This contract... You're really willing to let me sign this contract under these terms?" Bird asked, his heart stirring with emotion. Even if you searched high and low, it would still be quite difficult to find such a generous contract.

"Mhmm."

"From the moment I learned Alchemy to now, I've always been a failure in concocting. Why else would have my guild kicked me? Calculating the worth of all those medicinal ingredients I've destroyed to this day, it would probably reach two silvers at the very least! Please don't blame if you end up making a loss. Consider carefully, it's still not too late to renege on the contract." Bird presented the contract back to Nie Yan, gesturing that he could take it back. As the piece of paper fluttered in his hands, he felt a mix of apprehension and anxiousness in his heart. What if Nie Yan were to take back the contract? What would he do then?

"I'm not lacking in money. Even if I make a loss, then so be it. I know how to recognize my own faults. However... my insight has never been wrong. Rarely do I ever make mistakes when it comes to these things."

"Still... Isn't thirty percent too high of a price to pay for me?" Bird's voice was lacking in confidence. Even in those guilds that

paid well, their Alchemists would still receive no more than twenty percent.

“It’s already been decided. I believe you’re worth the price,” Nie Yan replied, waving his hand and gesturing for Bird to hurry up. To gain Bird’s absolute loyalty, it wouldn’t do if he simply gave him money. No, he needed to have good will, and bolstering Bird’s confidence and making him feel appreciated was a good place to start.

Bird truly didn’t understand just where Nie Yan’s trust in him came from. However, he could tell, from both actions and words, that Nie Yan believed in his ability. When a person was at their lowest point and felt like a failure, what they needed the most wasn’t anyone’s pity, but rather only a single line of acknowledgement. Nie Yan’s words were unremarkable; his tone was normal, and there was no hidden meaning. Yet they were able to bypass the guard Bird had raised and entered his heart.

“Alright, Bird paused for a moment to compose himself. “I’ll sign the contract! I’m also fine with you lowering my share, but please don’t blame me if you make a loss.” Bird couldn’t help but add the last clause as he answered.

“Rest assured. Even if you fail, I still won’t blame or trouble you,” Nie Yan replied in a calm tone. After travelling back to the past, he had absolute confidence in himself, and he certainly wouldn’t be short on money, be it inside the game or real life. The first opening month of the game was merely the starting point of when the real world economy would connect to the in-game one. Roughly two and a half weeks later, in-game property would be

available to purchase or bid on: shops, auction houses, land, and so on would all transform into privately owned entities. Various guilds backed by financial groups would certainly go into a bidding and buying frenzy for them. When real world currency could be converted into in-game currency and vice versa, the value of these properties would skyrocket. The players would discover the shops they bought for tens, hundreds, or even thousands of gold would go for millions, possibly even tens of millions of credits. As for auction houses, even if you listed them up for a hundred million credits, they would sell in an instant. This was the result of various large financial groups and adventure capitalists frantically investing in the scene. Nonetheless, owning a store or auction house truly would enable a player to reap enormous profits.

By using prophetic foresight, earning a profit certainly wouldn't be a problem. Why would he be afraid of raising an Alchemist like Bird? Come the day this apprentice Alchemist truly becomes the Medicine King, his returns would be well worth the initial investment!

The reason why his father met with failure after investing into Conviction was because he had come too late! He had missed the opportunity to buy up in-game properties before the real world economy and in-game one fully connected. By the time his father entered the scene, the large financial groups had already divided the game world's assets between themselves long ago and formed stable markets. When his father tried to forcefully enter, he was inevitably met with an iron plate known as the large financial groups.

He entered Conviction before his father did in order to lay out a path for him. Only then could his family avert the tragedy that

befell them in his original timeline.

The number of tasks he needed to complete in the first month before the real world economy connected were many. He needed to amass a lot of wealth, and he needed to coax others to join him so he could increase his influence. In the future, the properties he would need under his banner included: equipment shops, alchemy shops, auction houses, banks, large amounts of land, and general stores. Although he possessed the enormous advantage of being from the future, he still understood the logic that a lone tree could only support so much. What did this world need the most? Talent! And in front of his eyes was one such talent! He had stolen Victorious Return's future Medicine King from right under their noses, and he was now fostering their Medicine King under his own banner! Weakening your enemies' strength while simultaneously increasing your own, what reason could he possibly have in not doing this?

The sole reason he became Bird's benefactor was because he wanted the latter's loyalty and dedication.

After receiving Nie Yan's unconditional trust, Bird couldn't deny that he wasn't at least somewhat swayed. He silently made a resolve. Come hell or high water, he would dedicate himself to Nie Yan in order to live up to that trust. He had been similar to a drowning person, in desperate need of a lifeline. The lifeline happened to be someone's acknowledgement, and Nie Yan happened to be the person who threw it. As for why Nie Yan would go out of his way to recruit him or trust in his ability so much, he didn't know. Though, he felt this was fine, because those questions no longer mattered to him. Bird grabbed hold of the game generated pen and scribbled his signature on the contract.

Hereafter, all of Bird's crafting profession related expenses would be recorded by the system and covered by Nie Yan. In the event Bird violated his contract, he would have to pay an exorbitant fee. However, if Nie Yan voluntarily chose to null the contract on his own, he wouldn't receive a single cent from Bird.

"Follow me," Nie Yan said before directly heading to the auction house.

Following Nie Yan from behind, he still had no clue as to what fate had in store for him. Am I really suitable as an Alchemist...? he wondered. In the future, if he still remained a failure, would Nie Yan tell him to pack it up and go? All these questions were like a riddle that lingered in his mind. The expenses required to improve the Alchemy skill were immense. Would Nie Yan really be able to provide him with the necessary supplies?

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Two people, one in the front and the other in the back, entered the auction house.

"As long as you concentrate on concocting, I'll be satisfied. Let me prepare a few ingredients and materials to start you off. If you run out, feel free to send me a message at any time," Nie Yan said. As they walked down the auction house's halls, he turned on his bidding device.

Nie Yan began to sort through the prices of the goods and bought

four bags in a row.

“Why did you buy so many bags?”

“How could I not? An Alchemist’s bag is too small.”

“They’re for me...?” Bird asked in surprised tone. Out of the guild leaders he had met in the past, not a single one was willing to purchase these bags for their Alchemists. The only times these guild leaders would go out of their way to purchase various gifts were when the Alchemist was extraordinary or was in danger of being snatched away by others.

“Who else would I be giving them to?” Nie Yan replied in a matter-of-fact tone. He also purchased an entire set of Alchemy related wares. They were of a higher quality and possessed the addition property of increasing success rate when concocting by five percent. The price for the set cost him three silvers. Apart from the set of wares, he also purchased a large quantity of medicinal plants and formulas.

Bird witnessed Nie Yan purchase one item after another, and all of them were for him! Besides being surprised, he couldn’t help but feel touched as well. He had good reason to be surprised too; Nie Yan was actually so wealthy. He felt truly fortunate to have found a backer with such a large capital. The reason he felt touched was because Nie Yan actually spent so much money for his sake! This boss of his was definitely worthy of his admiration and respect. However, at the same time, a certain question popped up in his head. Was Nie Yan certain that he had the ability to return a profit?

Nie Yan had a large sum of wealth in his pockets. He could use it to rapidly nurture Bird into the Medicine King. In the coming years, a high-level Alchemist would become as precious as gold! Many of them would be valued at upwards of a hundred million credits. The Medicine King in his original timeline had a worth in the several hundred millions, and out of all Alchemists, he was ranked number three!

Considering his financial strength, he didn't believe he wouldn't be able to nurture Bird into the Medicine King.

Chapter 69 – Sulgata's Shadow

Nie Yan's act of generosity proved effective at persuading this Apprentice Alchemist's heart, though the unbridled manner in which he spent his money held a much more devious purpose. The further he invested into Bird, the further he would become irrevocably bound to his ship, thus making it all the more difficult to leave. In the event Bird truly wanted to get off, he'd have to pay an exorbitant price to do so, and considering his financial situation, trying to break away was basically impossible. In other words, Nie Yan had accomplished another one of his objectives.

By the end of his shopping spree, he had bought Bird ten silvers worth of alchemy recipes and a vast quantity of ingredients and materials, filling all five bags completely.

“Here, use these supplies for now. Even when I'm not around, focus hard on raising your skill,” Nie Yan said. These alchemical ingredients were sufficient to last Bird a long time.

Seeing the bags packed to the brim with various plants and recipes, Bird couldn't help feeling emotionally moved. No matter how much of an idiot he believed himself to be, he could tell these ingredients were more than enough for him to rank up to a Junior Alchemist. After being expelled from the Dark Hero guild, his experiences with Nie Yan felt like being pulled out of the depths of hell and placed into heaven. There were even several times where he believed this was all simply a dream.

“For showing me such kindness... I don't really know how I could ever repay you. So for now, I'll simply say thanks,” Bird said, his

voice trembling in gratitude.

“Enough of that, these lines are getting too cheesy. It’s not like I recruited you solely from the kindness of my heart; there was a purpose as well. As long as you’re able to become an Alchemy Master or even Grandmaster and earn me more money, that’ll be the best way to repay me,” Nie Yan replied, waving him to stop. He couldn’t help but ponder over a certain problem. After returning to the past, this was the first time he significantly changed history. Without Victorious Return’s support in this timeline, would Bird still be able to become a Grandmaster Alchemist? At the moment, he couldn’t be sure since there wasn’t a clear answer. He could only try his best to make it happen. After all, every investment held their risks. “Now that everything’s settled, go and improve your Alchemy. I still have a lot of other business to attend to.”

“Gotcha, boss! I’ll be excusing myself then,” Bird answered. If he failed to attain any results even after spending so much of Nie Yan’s money, he simply wouldn’t have the face to show himself again. From being kicked from his guild to being picked up by a stranger, an ember of hope and a certain desire had arisen from the ashes of his despair. Thus, he felt nothing but grateful towards this savior of his.

He expressed his gratitude once more and took his leave.

...

Nie Yan paused for a moment and began to ponder. Such a chance encounter was analogous to having picked up a gem off the streets. Even if Bird couldn’t reach the Grandmaster level in the

future, only reaching the Master level wouldn't be too much of a loss either.

He planned to slowly gather a few people to serve his purpose in the future. Medicine King Bird from his original timeline had become the first among these individuals he successfully recruited.

After returning to the past, he was filled with wild ambition. Establishing his own elite team, acquiring an alchemy shop, recruiting a Master Tailor... there were many things he wished to do. Perhaps one day, he would even be able to establish his own guild! He might not interact alongside them all the time but there were other methods to manage the guild as well. By using his knowledge of the game and future events, he could still develop his elite forces from afar.

Many mysterious and wondrous new areas would be released in future patches. Included, of course, would be new dungeons, crafting materials, and other items as well. Furthermore, there would be intense struggles over strongholds and enormous guilds wars beyond the scope of one's imagination. Even cities, provinces, or entire nations could get involved in these virtual battlefields.

In the previous timeline, countless financial firms across the globe had established their presence within the game. The potential commerce and booming economy within the game left many of these firms watering at their mouths. These major figures were itching to get the biggest slice while dividing up this enormous cake. They opened stores, established guilds, took over cities, and even became the powerful lords reigning over their regions.

Armed with the knowledge of the future, he was absolutely unwilling to be resigned to surviving in the cracks and crevices these numerous figures overlooked. Therefore he required his own power and influence in order to contend against them. He might not have any significant influence at present, but do remember: great oaks grew from the smallest of acorns, and even the tallest skyscrapers were built from the ground up. The foundations to realizing his wild ambitions were already steadily being built.

He withdrew from his daydreaming and began thinking of more immediate matters. No matter what the future held, his most urgent goal at present was still to hurry up and get strong.

He worked hard to recall the locations of the several other chapters from the Book of Order. As he quietly deliberated over the problem of acquiring the other chapters, he also began wondering which ones were attainable at his current level.

However, after a brief moment, he reluctantly decided that it was best to abandon such thoughts. All chapters were protected by a Guardian of Order. Were he to even attempt to retrieve another chapter in the hopes of surviving and succeeding, his actions could only be accurately described as foolishly throwing his life away. A few days ago, prior to his decision in retrieving the Chapter of Courage, he didn't have much to lose. He didn't have any valuable equipment on him, and at worst, he'd only drop a level. However, even he didn't expect himself to succeed in the end as he had only gone in with a try-and-see attitude. Moreover, the reason he succeeded had a lot to do with the Chapter of Courage's location, a closed ravine by the mountainside. They were natural barriers he could cross over and take advantage of, and the ravine itself was a

near a town. The other chapters certainly weren't located in such convenient places. At the same time, he now held the Chapter of Courage on him. If he were to go and retrieve the other chapters and somehow met with an accident, he'd lose that as well. The risks compared to the rewards were simply too high.

From the moment he entered the game to up until now, he had never played with the intention of levelling up at the fastest possible pace. Yet, he still managed to amass quite a few good things: the Ring of Woven Silk, the Featherfall Jewel, the Chapter of Courage, and numerous skills and stat points. These things represented the strength that he had slowly built up for himself and would allow him to walk even further in the future.

What else can I do? Diverting his train of thought, he began to recall of something else. The chapters from the Book of Order might be the sacred objects of those who guarded order. However, for Thieves, there was another item that was heavily coveted, a pair of Legendary-grade boots called Sulgata's Shadow. If he were to equip a piece of Legendary-grade equipment, he'd imagine his stats would be high enough to frighten others. Unfortunately, in the distant past during the Sulgata War, these boots were damaged and separated into three pieces, which were scattered across the Veridian Empire. Only by retrieving and assembling these three pieces together could this Legendary item be restored to its original form.

One of the pieces of Sulgata's Shadow was located in an area not far from Calore. The area was an ancient city that became swallowed by marshland.

Sulgata City, though abandoned, survived from the distant Dark Era to the present.

“The Ancient City of Sulgata... Tsk, what a troublesome area,” he muttered to himself. In the previous timeline, he had been to this location before but by that time, the piece had long been taken. Over the course of centuries, the city had transformed into an extremely queer place. The respawn rate and density of the monsters there were high as well, and trying to enter without a team certainly wouldn't be a simple matter.

However, for a Thief, it wasn't necessarily an impossible feat. Perhaps he would be able to secretly enter.

Legendary-grade equipment were truly too difficult to collect. Simply having an opportunity to retrieve Sulgata's Shadow, if only a part of it, was an extremely valuable thing, and he wasn't willing to let it slip by. Since after some time, he couldn't say for sure that there wasn't already a guild preparing to storm the city.

I should give it a try. Who knows? I might actually succeed in collecting all the pieces.

Before departure, he purchased a few consumables that he deemed necessary for this trip before leaving through Calore's west gates and teleporting to the surface. After reaching solid ground, he travelled to his destination, passed through a patch of wilderness where the warm sunlight shone down on the abundant vegetation which blanketed everything in green.

Passing the wilderness, he encountered an open plain. After walking through this plain for around ten minutes, he turned around and gazed east, looking into the horizon. There, he could see Calore, with its enormous walls and pearly white buildings, floating high in the air, suspended over the azure sky. Above the highest buildings, above the city itself, he saw a ring of light hovering and revolving in the air. Under the refraction of the mid-afternoon sun, the ring shone with a dazzling splendor.

This indestructible, impenetrable city in the sky represented the Veridian Empire's greatest achievement in architecture.

The Veridian Mages, with all their wisdom and matchless abundance in mana, had controlled powerful magic beyond imagination to prop this imposing city into the sky, where it would stay suspended for past and future generations.

Chapter 70 – Natlan Marsh

Going by foot is too slow. How long will it take for me to start riding a horse? It'd be so much faster and more comfortable. However, Nie Yan knew it would actually take over two months for horses to become commonplace as a method of transportation. They were simply too expensive. At present, even the lousiest of breeds still cost upwards of ten gold or more. It just wasn't worth it.

He retrieved a Basic Haste Scroll from his bag and activated it by crumpling it in his hand, before sprinting off towards Sulgata.

If there were players nearby, they would see a silhouette dashing across the open field, quickly disappearing into the distance.

Half an hour later, he encountered a new area as the surroundings transitioned into a dark marshland. This location was far from town so few players could be seen hunting here. Almost no one actively sought out this strange place that was inherently filled with danger. However, every so often, a rare bunch would take the initiative in exploring this marsh. Many of them were thrillseekers who happened to be high-level experts as well. On the road here, he had encountered many such players travelling in groups.

Short stubby bushes flourished all over. A dense fog lingered in the air and blocked the sunlight from above. While every so often, a cold wind blew past. The marsh left an eerie impression on those who came across it.

The earth was muddied and filled with basins of festering waters, where the occasional corpse of some unlucky animal could be found rotting inside. A slight rustle or movement periodically came from within the shrubs, as one or two snake-type monsters slithered by. All sorts of hidden dangers were lurking inside this dark marsh.

「System: You've discovered Natlan Marsh!」

I'm finally here. He examined the everlasting fog of the Natlan Marsh. Passing through this area will take a bit of effort.

He cautiously moved between the bushes, wary of the potential monsters lurking nearby. He did his best to evade their sights. However, after passing through a dense patch of shrubbery, his high Awareness warned him of impending danger.

「Rustle! Rustle! Rustle!」A large silhouette charged past the shrubs and pounced at him.

He instinctively dodge rolled and avoided the sudden attack. but not before getting a good look at the enemy's appearance. It was a Marsh Monitor, a species of large lizards that lurked in this map. The one that appeared was over two meters in length. Its dark green skin was speckled with black. Sharp protrusions grew from its head and tail. These protrusions along with its claws were covered in a viscous green poison which caused paralysis. Those unlucky enough to be struck by this poison would be unable to move for three seconds. The paralyzing poison was the Marsh Monitor's most dangerous weapon.

Ah, it's these guys. His felt a bit apprehensive. Although these lizards had relatively low health and were quite frail, the consequences of being struck by their attacks were fatal.

In his previous life, an expert had once left some words of advice. Under no circumstances should you underestimate a monster because even the weakest of Marsh Monitors was still capable of causing death.

At the lower levels, these lizards were the nemesis of all Mages and Thieves since these professions relied on their mobility to survive. In the event a Thief or Mage became paralyzed, these Marsh Monitors could freely rip them to shreds. Even heavy-armoured Fighters were susceptible to being killed by these lizards if they were careless.

Marsh Monitor: Level 6

Health: 360/360

The Marsh Monitor's attack struck air as its body fell back to the ground.「Crash!」Its heavyset body sent mud and water flying everywhere.

At the end of the roll, Nie Yan retrieved his dagger and wielded it in his right hand in a reverse grip. He returned with Concussive Blow, Assassinate, and Vital Strike.

Then he finished with a flurry of attacks before the Concussive Blow's stun duration timed out. Afterward, the Marsh Monitor trembled and collapsed to the ground.

These lizards truly were frail. As long as the player wasn't hit, they were extremely easy to kill.

Under Nie Yan's assault, the Marsh Monitor hadn't been given the slightest bit of leeway and was killed in their first exchange.

After switching over to Level 5 equipment, his attack rose to over sixty points. Honestly, to the present player base, such a high attack was simply unimaginable on a Thief. Coupled with his profession's innately fast attacks, his damage per second rose to an unprecedented degree. Apart from the leaders of the major guilds, very few players wore equipment of his quality. Even if they did, he still possessed the Chapter of Courage.

Even though he had fought and killed the Marsh Monitor, which was above his level, he didn't feel the slightest bit of strain and was entirely in his element during the battle. This was the result of his high Willpower and Awareness, overbearing attack power, extreme maneuverability, and fast attack speed.

He killed several more Marsh Monitors along the trek forward. Due to his agility and speed, not a single one was able to reach him.

The further he travelled into the marsh, the denser the fog became, obscuring his vision even more. This caused him to be extremely carefully with every step forward. Although he could easily kill these Marsh Monitors, even if he were struck once, they could do the same to him as well.

The dense fog rolled and drifted in the air. From time to time, he would see strange shadows appearing and disappearing within it.

These illusions were the remnants of a forgotten battlefield. The sounds of soldiers roaring and cavalry charging into battle could be faintly heard in his ears. However, as soon as the cold wind blew again, these desolate illusions of a distant play would drift away with it.

Suddenly, he heard the sound of approaching footsteps. They were heavy but amidst the other sounds, he couldn't distinguish if they were real.

He didn't notice anything unusual until he felt the ground begin to shake. Only then did he realize his situation wasn't good. He swept his gaze towards the direction of the footsteps and saw a Marsh Monitor crawling out of a nearby brush. The moment he saw its scarlet red tongue flicking out of its mouth, a strong fishy smell assaulted his nose.

This [lizard](#) was five meters in length. It was supported by four powerful limbs and a thick, long tail that was covered in spikes. Its entire body was covered in ash-black scales save for a patch of

white which formed a strange pattern on its neck.

Even for the original inhabitants of Natlan Swamp, this lizard was an extremely terrifying existence. The white pattern on its neck represented an old mystery as well as death.

This lizard was clearly different from the others he had met.

The giant lizard noticed his presence and charged. Its tail twisting and turning as it ran in an [awkward gait](#). Though awkward as it may be, its speed was not to be trifled with. In reality, this unique gait was the reason it could move so quickly. In merely a brief few seconds, it had already arrived in front of him.

He activated Swift Retreat to pull some distance while simultaneously examining it with Transcendent Insight.

Serpentine Lizard (Sub-Elite): Level 7

Health: 1,200/1,200

His heart filled with shock when he read its name. Why the hell did I end meeting this guy!?

These lizards only roamed around the Natlan Marshland and were Sub-Elite monsters. At his current level, let alone a Level 7 Sub-Elite, even if he met a Leader-class monster at his own level, he'd still have no choice but to flee. The only reason he was able to take on Gato the Lion King and the Ogre Devourer was because they spawned in areas with exploitable terrain. However, in this

marshland, there was no such terrain to speak of, and it was impossible for him to face it head-on. These lizards were the true overlords of this map.

Although the Serpentine Lizard didn't have very much health compared to other Sub-Elites at the same level, it compensated with an exceedingly high attack. It could also release its poison into the mud and spread it through a mist. Level 10 or lower players were simply no match for this monster in a one-on-one fight. Only a party of five or more Level 10 players would dare to take on this overgrown lizard. In his original timeline, since many players ended up dying at their hands while training in this area, they were nicknamed the Killers of the Marsh

The Serpentine Lizard closed the distance in an instant and arrived in front of him, spewing out a poisonous mist from its mouth. After being released from its mouth, the green mist rapidly dispersed into the surroundings.

While within it, only a slight whiff would cause the player to become confused and dazed.

Chapter 71 – Elemental Temple Magic

-20... -20... -20...

What a strong corrosive poison!

Nie Yan didn't dare to meet the Serpentine Lizard head-on. He rolled out of the poisonous mist, slipping past its head, and landed right next to it. In fact, he was so close he see each ashen black scale.

The Serpentine Lizard immediately swept its thick and powerful tail at him in response.

The tail resembled a whip as it whistled through the air at a ridiculous velocity.

He'd be done for if the lizard's attack were to land. Even if he was lucky enough to survive, he'd still end up losing the greater half of his health!

Swift Retreat!

His movement speed explosively increased by thirty percent. Even then, it barely allowed him to keep up with the Serpentine Lizard. He quickly pulled away and evaded the attack by a hair's breadth. Then, he turned tail and leapt over a large patch of shrubbery whereupon he gracefully landed back on the ground and fled for his life.

The Serpentine Lizard shifted its massive five-meter body and went in immediate pursuit.

Two silhouettes, one large and the other small, rapidly traversed the marshes.

Nie Yan glanced back from the corner of his eye and noticed the Serpentine Lizard shortening the distance by every second. He activated a Basic Haste Scroll and bolstered his speed by another twenty percent.

Although its target had been pulled further away, the Serpentine Lizard didn't falter and continued to give chase. They were known as the most difficult monster to deal with in the marsh. The moment they set their sights on their prey, as long as it was still within the boundaries of the marsh, they would be unrelenting in their pursuit.

Nie Yan's mind was in turmoil. He knew Swift Retreat's duration wouldn't last long, and when the timer ran out, the Serpentine Lizard would close the distance and catch up.

His eyes frantically swept over the surroundings as he searched for some way to live. Although he knew it would be incredibly difficult to survive this encounter, he didn't want to sit and wait for death.

When all seemed lost, a surge of electricity emerged amidst the gaps of some distant thickets. His pupils contracted as his heart

rapidly beat with excitement. He immediately moved towards the source of this magic.

Though a forbidden zone for low-level players, the Natlan Marsh was a wonderland for experts, a statement which held especially true for elite teams. Many of them came here for no other reason than to retrieve a certain item that could be found in this marsh—the Revive skill book!

The Marsh Monitors had a one in ten thousand chance of dropping this skill book. Despite its low drop rate, it was heavily sought after because of its incredible value in a team, so much that its importance far outstripped everything else. A Priest who learned the skill could revive a fallen teammate. Such an effect was a substantial buffer against potential losses in a run. At times, it could even save the team from being completely wiped!

Other than the Revive skill book, players could find decent equipment such as the Moon Chaser Staff, which gave Lightning Damage +9 and Intelligence +5, and the Sacred Wind Mallet, which gave Holy Shield +8 and Resilience +5. The common mobs in the marsh did drop Silver-or Gold-grade equipment but like the Revive book, their drop rates were quite low.

The equipment that came out of this map were of good quality. Moreover, since a team had recently found the Revive skill book while training here, increasingly more players flocked to this map in search of it. Therefore, the number of experts in the marsh weren't all that few.



Elsewhere at an earlier time.

“Why hasn’t Candy returned yet?” asked a dark-faced man in crimson bone armour. His name was Dark Eternal Sin. He could be considered a well-known figure, though his fame lay outside the game. Before Conviction’s release, there were several other famous Virtual Reality Games such as Kings Tree and Purgatory. Dark Eternal Sin was the guild leader of Dark Empire and a powerful overlord in these games. However, to the surprise of others, he had chosen not to re-establish his guild when he entered Conviction, and instead he had only formed a team with his close friends. Nonetheless, he and his team were not to be underestimated. In fact, they were quite amazing. His Death’s Sacrifice +2 armour set was proof of this. It belonged to a Level 5 Gold-grade equipment set, and he had successfully upgraded it twice with Fortune Gems. Its properties could be rated as one of the highest among similar equipment.

Dark Eternal Sin chose Berserker as his profession. He had a tall stature, [a fairly tan skin tone](#), and a ferocious appearance. Wherever he stood, he seemed like an immovable iron tower. At the centre of his bone armour was a giant skull that radiated a crimson glow. His weapon of choice was a black greatsword which he currently held in his hands. It was excessively broad, over two meters in length, and permeated with destructive power.

Dark Eternal Sin had brought over six of his members to train here. Excluding him, there were three Mages, one Priest, and one Thief. The person he had previously mentioned was the team’s Thief.

“There are probably no more monsters left for her to aggro,” the Holy Mage replied. She wore a pure-white robe that emitted a faint glow. Her staff appeared to radiate light as well, specifically from the clear crystal embedded at the end.

Her appearance was beautiful, and she held a faint seductive charm. Her figure wasn't bad either. She was relatively tall, and her cleavage was full of allure. When paired with her Dancing Light Gown, she became quite enchanting.

“You're probably right. There aren't many monsters in this spot anymore. If she doesn't go a bit farther, she won't be able to pull any over.” Eternal Sin nodded his head in agreement.

At the same moment, a Thief appeared within their sights. She could be seen leading roughly a dozen Marsh Monitors towards their location.

Her appearance was exceptionally delicate and pretty. Her skin was fair and worthy of making any woman feel jealous. However, for some reason, she gave off a dark, murderous aura that couldn't be put into words.

She was quite agile; she gracefully dodged the Marsh Monitors' attacks while bringing them over.

In the former Dark Empire guild, she was absolutely someone who shouldn't be overlooked—she was known as the deadliest member of their roster. The type of professions she previously

played in other games were always Assassins, Thieves, and the like. During her run in these older games, numerous experts ended up dying by her hands. Her reputation was so terrifying that expressions would change into horror upon the mention of her name.

“Su Yan (White Smoke), prepare your magic!” Eternal Sin commanded. He prepared himself for Candy’s approach alongside the monsters in tow by grasping both hands on his greatsword firmly. The spot they chose to station at held advantageous terrain.

Su Yan and the two other Mages, an Elementalist and an Arcane Mage, brandished their staffs and began casting their spells. Soon, magical energy rapidly gathered in the air.

However, the one that brought the most attention among the three seemed to be the Elementalist. The air above him flashed and surged with electricity. As he held his staff with one hand, the other was raised in the air with his palm facing the sky. The electricity slowly began condensing above his head and transformed into a massive sphere.

Yet the Elementalist continued to chant his magic. It seemed like a high-level spell that required more than one set of syllables to cast. As he persisted with his incantation, the magical symbols appeared like tadpoles swimming in the air, dissipating as they rose into the sky.

Eternal Sin observed the ten or so Marsh Monitors charging closer. In the next moment, he brandished his greatsword and ran

up to meet them. He let out a roar and used Whirlwind Slash, clashing with three of them in close distance.

At the same time, a brilliant beam of light and an Arcane Fireball fell over the group of Marsh Monitors.

「Boom! Boom!」The two spells exploded on impact. Even after their spells landed, the Elementalist named Lei Fa (Lightning Magic) was still in the middle of casting.

Meanwhile, on the frontline, Eternal Sin was chugging an Anti-Paralysis Potion. After he finished drinking it, he violently cleaved at a nearby Marsh Monitor that was low-health and killed it. “Dammit! Elemental Temple Magic is too inconvenient. It’s been so long yet it still hasn’t finished casting!”

Just as he spoke, a giant of ball of lightning whistled past his head and flew towards the group of Marsh Monitors ahead. 「Boom!」The sphere of lightning exploded like fireworks. Electric sparks crackled and scattered in every direction. In a single flash, the spell had annihilated six Marsh Monitors.

-360, -360, -360...

A cluster of damage numbers rose above the group of lizards.

There was a wide crater left in the earth from the impact of the spell. Marsh Monitor corpses were littered everywhere while the ones that weren’t directly hit suffered heavy damage nonetheless.

“Though its destructive power is pretty good...” Eternal Sin swept his gaze over the scene. This spell was extremely powerful, but it was only good for mobbing. A spell that took such a long time to cast was completely worthless in PvP situations.

After casting the spell, the Elementalist’s mana bar was completely drained. He sat to the side cross-legged and drank [a flask of Spring Water](#) to replenish mana.

Chapter 72 – Thief

Elemental Temple Magic, which could only be learned by Elementalists, came from the various Elemental Shrines scattered across the continent. It was divided into sixteen ranks, with rank sixteen denoting the highest possible rank. The Thousand Swallows Burst from just a moment ago was classified as a rank one Elemental Temple Magic. It had a long channeling time, requiring [a full set of syllables](#) to successfully cast. The long casting time made it impractical in one-versus-one battles. As for team battles, it could be easily cancelled by a Paladin using Silence. Such reasons made it unsuitable for PvP. Not to mention its lengthy cooldown period, which came to a total of two entire days. Hence, Elementalists that learnt rank one Elemental Temple Magic would only cast them during emergencies. Naturally, if it was a high-level Elemental Temple Magic, for example the rank sixteen Mantra of Silence, it would be an entirely different case.

After Thousand Swallows Burst ended, Candy stealthily circled round a Marsh Monitor's back. She raised her dagger and struck the back of its head with Smothering Strike. The dagger flickered with a cold glint as she arced the blade through her target's neck. Her methods were efficient and brutal. The low-health Marsh Monitor stood no chance and collapsed to the ground.

“Flame Slash!” Eternal Sin cleaved down as his greatsword was enveloped by an intense blaze.「Boom!」His blade directly beheaded and cauterized a Marsh Monitor's neck. The raging flames continued burning until its entire body was charred black.

The five remaining Marsh Monitors charged past and made a bee-line for the three Mages in the rear. However, Eternal Sin

roared and stopped them in their tracks by using Taunt!

The moment his Taunt came out, the five lizards immediately aggroed onto him and unleashed a flurry of attacks. -15, -16, -18... Several damage values emerged and rose above his head. Fortunately, his defense was solid, so despite being encircled, these lizards posed no threat.

The Priest in the rear cast Dispel, removing the paralysis debuff, then followed up with Lesser Heal. As a result, Eternal Sin immediately recovered a large chunk of health.

With all five Marsh Monitors aggroed onto him, Eternal Sin brandished his greatsword and activated Whirlwind Slash. Immediately, his spinning blade swept through their bodies and dealt over fifty damage to each.

Su Yan (White Smoke) and the Arcane Mage continued casting spells in the rear.

Despite being besieged by Marsh Monitors, Eternal Sin firmly held his ground like an immovable boulder. The earth was splattered with blood, some from the lizards and some his own. Amidst the madness that shone in his eyes, he erupted in a frenzy intertwined with ruthlessness and bloodlust. His entire being was akin to an enraged beast, his every action hammering fear into one's heart.

Su Yan and the others couldn't help but tremble when witnessing Eternal Sin in such a state. He was simply a killing machine that

maniacally swung his sword for slaughter.

The only one who remained unperturbed was Candy. She curled her lips and uttered, “Boring...” before lightly yawning. She then rummaged through her knapsack and took out a piece of [fruit candy](#) that could be bought at the NPC general store. Popping it into her mouth, she entered Stealth and approached a Monitor Lizard from the rear. Smothering Strike! Upon activating the skill, she struck the lizard on the backside of its head with the pommel of her dagger. Now that it was stunned, her blade easily pierced its flesh and sent out a spray of blood.

Eternal Sin and his team had fairly good synergy. Within a brief timespan, they were able to easily make short work of the dozen or so lizards.

Candy retrieved her dagger from a Marsh Monitor’s corpse and calmly wiped off the blood.

“Big Guy, the monsters here are too scarce. Let’s go somewhere else,” Candy said to Eternal Sin.

Only Candy would dare to call him in such a way since the others didn’t have the nerves to do so. This sense of familiarity came from having known each other for a long time. As for how long? No one knew. However, one fact remained consistent throughout the years: whenever Dark Empire was overturning the entire world of those previous games, Candy was never absent.

Although Candy and Eternal Sin didn’t establish a guild, the

rallying power they held within Conviction was still extremely astonishing.

Eternal Sin strapped his greatsword on his back and turned to face the other members. “Let’s take a small break. We’ll switch locations afterwards.”

And so, atop a mound of dry earth under the shade of a tree, six players rested while eating Bread and drinking Spring Water.



Although the clamor of battle had recently ended, Nie Yan continued heading towards its source as he dashed through the marsh. Eventually, six players entered his sights.

At the same moment, Eternal Sin and his party also discovered him and quickly stood up in response.

Nie Yan observed the other party’s equipment as he neared, and he was particularly surprised by Eternal Sin’s equipment. What a strong group of players! Even then, the Serpentine Lizard was closing in from the rear, so he no choice but to disregard their strength and press on.

“It’s a Thief...” Eternal Sin said, after getting a better look at Nie Yan, though in no way did he believe this single Thief would pose a threat. Why? Because the strongest Thief in the game was standing right here beside them. Not to mention, with his high health and

defense, there was simply no reason to fear any Thief in the first place. Even if Nie Yan's equipment did look somewhat decent to him, to this day, there had never been a single Thief that could defeat him. This wasn't confidence born out of arrogance but rather confidence that came from absolute strength.

"Oh?" Candy's figure gradually faded before completely merging with the greenery in the background.

As Nie Yan ran, his eyes fell on a certain patch of shrubbery off in the distance. The other side's prowess using Stealth was near flawless. Ordinary players or even experts might not be able to detect her presence, but she definitely wouldn't go unnoticed by him.

Candy felt a tinge of surprise as she saw Nie Yan's gaze focus on her. Oh...? It seems they encountered an interesting fellow.

Though he could clearly sense the open hostility in the moment he appeared before them, his circumstances were quite dire since the Serpentine Lizard was already close to his heels. He had to take this gamble, but he wasn't naive enough to believe these six would help him out of the kindness of their hearts. So, he was left with no other choice. He would pass the Serpentine Lizard off to them and make use of their power order to survive!

He accelerated his pace and bolted straight for Eternal Sin and the others.

Eternal Sin unstrapped his greatsword and firmly grasped it in

his hand. The blade was at an incline angle and firmly planted on the earth so he could be ready to receive his opponent. He stood no further than two meters from his Mages. Though he personally wasn't afraid, things could get quite dangerous if he let this Thief enter their rearline.

Eternal Sin, who wore the Death's Sacrifice set, resembled an iron wall that blocked the path to the three Mages behind him.

Just as Eternal Sin was prepared to cut down this Thief, the bushes in the distance stirred with activity, causing his heart to leap in surprise. Don't tell me there's more people at his rear?

He soon discovered what followed the Thief from behind wasn't a player but rather... [a gigantic lizard](#)! It was several times larger than the ordinary lizard monsters in this area.

"Shit... It's a Serpentine!" Candy drew in a breath of cold air upon seeing the lizard's distinct gait. They were a terrifying existence: apex predators, killers of the marsh, and capable of reaching lightning-fast speeds.

"Level 7 Sub-Elite?" Eternal Sin stammered and retreated several steps back to the mound. They could have easily handled the situation if the second figure had been another player, but what arrived was a Level 7 Sub-Elite instead! It was an existence that was difficult to deal with even at their levels. Not to mention their Priest had yet to learn Revive. It would be a disastrous loss if one or two of them ended up dying due to this.

As Nie Yan drew increasingly near, the Elementalist at Eternal Sin's rear brandished their staff and sent lightning crackling toward him.

This Thief's intentions were already quite obvious to them. He wanted to pass the Serpentine Lizard off to them. Naturally, Eternal Sin and his group wouldn't be polite. None of them dared to receive such a flaming hot potato.

Behind the bolt of lightning, Su Yan and the Arcane Mage's attacks arrived in tow.

By this time, the Serpentine Lizard was basically nipping at his heels. It wound up its body, and in the next instant, pounced at him like an arrow. In response, Nie Yan rolled to the side and evaded its attack and incidentally, Lei Fa's (Lightning Magic) bolt of lightning.「Bang!」However, he was unable to avoid a Holy Strike aimed prior to where he rolled to.

—67

「System: A member of the party led by player Eternal Sin has taken the initiative to attack you. You are free to retaliate in legitimate self-defense. Duration: 30 minutes.」

Dammit! What kind of damage is that!? Nie Yan inwardly cried out in alarm. He rolled again and avoided the oncoming Arcane Fireball. Just as the spell passed by him, he felt a murderous intent nearing his back.

Their Thief!

Chapter 73 – Tricked

Cloaking and Awareness were directly opposing stats. In situations where the opponent was a Thief under the effects of Stealth, they could only be seen clearly if the other party's Awareness was higher than the Thief's Cloaking by fifty percent or more. When the two stats were equal, the Thief could be spotted if the other player concentrated hard enough while searching. If the Thief was good, however, then in situations where Cloaking exceeded the defending side's Awareness, the opposing player would be stunned before they even had a chance to react.

Naturally, this wasn't to say that when a Thief was discovered their attacks could be easily avoided. After all, Thieves were innately fast, whether it be in terms of movement or attack.

In a certain region within the marsh, the air distorted to reveal a silhouette. Its owner was Candy, who had activated Stealth and disappeared earlier on. She had re-emerged at Nie Yan's rear. Her attack was terrifyingly fast as she attempted to strike him in the back of the head.

A single Concussive Blow would leave him stunned long enough to allow the Mages to send him directly to the graveyard.

However, before Candy even approached his back, he had already discovered her presence. Those nineteen points in Awareness weren't just for show. He smoothly leaned to the side and avoided her strike.

After dodging, he pivoted his foot and struck back with his own Concussive Blow, aimed directly at her temple.

What a decisive attack! Candy rapidly pulled back, evading by just a hair's breadth, before distancing herself from Nie Yan.

This Thief had somehow discovered her!? Just how high was his Awareness? Not to mention his quick reaction speed and even fiercer counter. His movements were as natural as the floating clouds and flowing waters, a matchless style which left her heart in shock. What a strong guy!

At the moment, the average player was still quite low level, and although there weren't many methods of attack, close-combat was the best judge of the opposing player's experience and skills.

An expert! Candy was instantly convinced of this thought, though she wasn't disheartened. In fact, she was delighted since things wouldn't be interesting otherwise.

Just as their exchange ended, the Serpentine Lizard chose this moment to charge at Nie Yan from the side. Its gigantic body drew increasingly closer as its gaping maw appeared wider with each passing millisecond. He sidestepped the attack, locked his eyes onto a tree in the distance, then extended his left hand and shot out a line of webbing from his Ring of Woven Silk.

He jerked the web line and pulled himself out of immediate attack range.

The Serpentine Lizard's attack had struck thin air yet again, enraging it to no end. It swung its body around and charged at Nie Yan once more.

In the brief moment when it had lost sight of him, Nie Yan activated a Basic Haste Scroll and bolted towards the three Mages at Eternal Sin's rear. For the sake of preserving his life, he had no choice but to lead the Serpentine Lizard towards them; otherwise, he'd have no chance of surviving.

Eternal Sin firmly grasped his greatsword and blocked the approaching opponent's path. He readied himself and prepared to attack when Nie Yan entered his range. A Thief's innately frail defense meant that as long as he got in a few strikes, they could be easily killed.

As Nie Yan drew closer, Eternal Sin stared fixedly at him and the Serpentine Lizard in tow. At this point, it would be hard to avoid a confrontation with the lizard, though the most immediate issue was Nie Yan. They needed to kill him off; otherwise, it'd become quite annoying if he started wreaking havoc while they fought it.

Although Nie Yan initially had no enmity with Eternal Sin and his group, when he lead such a disaster towards them, it'd be quite normal for them to hate his guts.

Yet at the same time, this was also the wilderness, a place where life or death depended on skill. So even if they died, they would have no one to blame but themselves since they lacked the strength to survive.

By now the Serpentine was about to overtake Nie Yan, but the latter was likewise about to enter Eternal Sun's range.

Eternal Sin brandished his blade and completely sealed off his path. It appeared he was going to match the Serpentine Lizard and perform a pincer attacker.

Nie Yan fully understood that the other party really wanted him dead. There was an enemy in front and another chasing from behind. He was being forced onto a narrow path. If he were to have the slightest slip-up, the Serpentine Lizard would pounce on him and Eternal Sin wouldn't hesitate in cutting him down where he stood.

Seeing his opponent enter striking distance, Eternal Sin directly slashed down as a blade of light flew towards Nie Yan's face. In the same instant, Nie Yan fiercely pivoted and leaped toward a nearby thicket.

The blade of light struck Nie Yan mid-leap and drew blood, followed by two explosions as a Holy Smite and a bolt of lightning landed afterwards.

-65

-89

-72

Several damage values rose above his head, and he had nearly lost all of his health with a little over a tenth remaining.

Shit! Just how far can he leap!?

Eternal Sin immediately felt his heart sink after seeing Nie Yan successfully escape through the bushes.

How high or how far a player could leap was based on the Strength and Jump stats as well as weight load. The upper limit of how high a player could leap was five meters. The higher Strength and Jump were, the more powerful the leap. On the other hand, as weight increased, jump range decreased.

Fortunately for Nie Yan, his weight load was light, and he possessed the Chapter of Courage which provided fifteen points in Jump. It was no wonder his leap was so astonishing.

Eternal Sin was confident in obstructing and pinning Nie Yan down. He had even perfectly matched the timing of his attack with the Serpentine Lizard. If things had proceeded without a hitch, his opponent would have been dead in less than five seconds. Yet, never did he expect that Nie Yan would turn into a frog and bound across the bushes to escape.

In the next moment, the Serpentine Lizard arrived at Nie Yan's previous position. It had lost sight of its target. Fortunately, there was new prey standing right beside. It immediately turned around and pounced at Eternal Sin.

He had been tricked! As he stared at the giant lizard already in mid-leap, he knew he didn't have the chance to retreat. He brandished his greatsword and stepped forward to meet it head-on.

"Everyone, be careful of that Thief! Candy, go after him!" Eternal Sin promptly commanded, then focused on repelling the Serpentine Lizard's attacks. He feared Nie Yan would turn back and sneak attack the Mages in the backline.

The situation could get dangerous if Nie Yan got within melee range of the Mages. He could easily overwhelm them using his skill and agility, especially against the Priest who couldn't put up much of a fight.

"No worries. Just leave it to me." Candy's eyes flashed with a peculiar expression. This guy's quite skilled.

After successfully baiting Eternal Sin into engaging the Serpentine Lizard, Nie Yan turned around to examine the scene. Seeing as Eternal Sin and the Serpentine were already fighting, he felt somewhat alleviated of his stress. I finally got that lizard off my tail.

Should I take advantage of the situation to get rid of them or should I just leave? Nie Yan pondered for a moment. Let's watch and see for now...

Nie Yan entered Stealth and began blending in with the background before completely disappearing from view.

The Mages at the rear spotted Nie Yan's dissipating silhouette from across the bushes. When they noticed they couldn't detect his presence, they couldn't help bunching up a little. Despite their surroundings seeming completely empty, they felt an enormous pressure weighing down on them.

Candy also entered Stealth and scanned the surrounding for traces of Nie Yan. However, she didn't dare to stray too far from the Mages. A Thief in hiding posed too much of a danger to lightly armoured professions.

The only sound that emanated from the scene was the battle between Eternal Sin and the Serpentine Lizard. Eternal Sin's defenses were high so he could hold it off temporarily. After a short while, the Mages and the Priest also began casting their spells.

Nie Yan glanced at his health bar; only a slight sliver remained. He hid behind the cover of the bushes and began applying bandages.

+20... +20... +20...

He restored two hundred health after ten seconds. Only then did he loosen his mind that had been edge ever since he encountered the Serpentine Lizard .

Afterwards, he quietly observed the battle. Eternal Sin firmly held his ground as the Priest healed him and Mages dealt damage. Their composure and synergy left him wondering why he didn't

recognize them. They were such a strong team! However, after thinking about it for while, it made sense. In his original timeline, there were countless experts who were reserved and didn't reveal their strength. It was quite normal that he didn't recognize them.

Chapter 74 – Foiled Ambush

The Serpentine Lizard's attacks were especially ferocious. Even if Eternal Sin's defense was very high, he would still find them somewhat difficult to endure.

「Hiss! Hiss!」Just as its scarlet tongue flickered in and out, the lizard opened its jaw and spat out a green globular substance. Upon contact with the air, it near instantaneously turned gaseous, rapidly expanded, and enshrouded everything within a two-meter radius in a poisonous mist.

-30... -30... -30... Damage values continuously rose above Eternal Sin's head with each passing second.

Each one of the Serpentine's attacks dealt more than eighty damage to his health. At the rate the battle was currently going in, he wouldn't be able to hold on for much longer.

“Death Speech, hurry up and cast Dispel!”

The team's Priest, Death Speech, responded and hurriedly cast Dispel as a gentle ray of pure white fell on Eternal Sin's position. The light reacted with the poisonous mist and within an instant, caused it to dilute by a great degree.

Eternal Sin glanced at his health bar which only had a hundred and sixty health remaining, though he didn't have much time to ruminate over it as the Serpentine Lizard resumed its assault. He raised his greatsword in an effort to resist its attack, but the lizard

latched onto him and bit out a chunk of flesh.

-76

Tendon Break!

Eternal Sin struck out in retaliation. The Serpentine Lizard's movements immediately turned sluggish as it temporarily entered a crippled state. Taking advantage of this brief window, he hurriedly drew back in order to open some distance.

Just at that time, Lei Fa (Lightning Magic), the Elementalist, finished his incantation and cast Freeze Frost, whereupon a thin layer of ice began covering the Serpentine Lizard and slowed its movements even more.

This freeze effect was trademark of an Elementalist's Ice Magic.

Death Speech promptly followed up by casting Lesser Heal, while Eternal Sin downed a Basic Recovery Potion to supplement the healing. After the initial burst of healing, the red of his health bar continued to steadily rise.

Even while recovering, Eternal Sin stayed on full alert as he knew that Thief didn't go too far. If he emerged and caught them off guard, it would be difficult to predict the outcome of the battle.

Just as his health replenished by three fourths, the cripple and

freeze debuffs wore off, and the Serpentine Lizard came rushing forward.

Sub-Elite monsters were truly too difficult to deal with. Even Eternal Sin, who wore Death's Sacrifice +2, lost health at such a rapid pace. If it were another team with worse equipment, they would've long wiped by now.

Despite their combined efforts, the Serpentine Lizard still had a little over seventy percent health remaining.

「Candy, have you found him yet?」

「No, I have no idea where that slippery bastard ran off to.」

「Everyone, remain alert. Su Yan (White Smoke), be ready to use that spell!」

「Understood,」Su Yan replied promptly. After having known each other for so long, Eternal Sin only needed to say a few words and she would understand what was needed of her.

Although Nie Yan couldn't listen in on what Eternal Sin and his team were conversing about, he knew it concerned him. However, they were heavily overestimating themselves. As a Thief with over ten years of experience, he wouldn't allow himself to be caught so easily.

Their team isn't bad. They might actually be able to kill it... He

stared intently at the ferocious Serpentine Lizard. A Level 7 Sub Elite, who knows what sort of items it'll drop?

For the time being, he didn't have any immediate plans of going against Eternal Sin and his team. However, it wouldn't necessarily be too late to decide after the two sides wore each other out a little further.

Eternal Sin brandished his greatsword. He fiercely slashed down on the Serpentine Lizard's body and dealt incredibly high damage.

「What are your manas at?」Eternal Sin asked in the team chat.

「67%.」

「78%.」

「32%.」Lei Fa cast his gaze at Eternal Sin's expression, afraid that he would get angry.

「Why is it so low?」Eternal Sin furrowed his brows and asked.

「When the battle started, my mana wasn't fully recovered. Then later on, I used several high-damage spells...」

「Enough, just conserve what's left of it.」Eternal Sin didn't say more after listening to the Lei Fa's explanation.

Lei Fa switched to the low-mana-cost Ice Arrow. After a while, his mana was still low, so he drank a Basic Mana Potion and restored his mana to sixty-seven percent. ✂ ✂ ✂

Under the constant battering spells, the Serpentine Lizard's health eventually fell to a little over twenty percent.

It only has around two hundred health left! By this point, Eternal Sin's mind was already tense to the point of snapping.

Once its health fell below the twenty percent line, the Serpentine Lizard's skin began changing into a peculiar red.「HISS! HISS!」It let out a strange cry, and subsequently, the ground beneath Eternal Sin's feet turned muddy.

He was inwardly alarmed when he discovered he couldn't pull out his feet which began to sink.

Not even a second later, the Serpentine Lizard leapt at him again. He activated Whirlwind Slash and successfully repelled it several steps back.

Seeing Eternal Sin trapped in the mud pit, Candy suddenly thought of something and anxiously commanded,「Death Speech, use Illuminate!」

The Priest didn't dare to dally after hearing Candy's order. He extended his palm and sent a sphere of light flying into the air, whereupon it released a blinding radiance that fell to the earth like

a curtain of silk.

Illuminate was a spell that revealed everything within a five-meter radius of the Priest. As the spell revealed its effects, the outline of a silhouette wielding two daggers gradually emerged behind the Priest. The silhouette was already mid-strike, the pommel of his dagger going straight for the back of the Priest's head!

"He's there!" Candy raised her dagger and dashed in to intercept Nie Yan.

The sound of blades clashing against each other reverberated through the air.

Nie Yan had been hard pressed to find an opening. Nonetheless, his patience had persevered. Taking advantage of the havoc caused by the Serpentine Lizard's skill, he silently approached the Priest's back, and just as he was about to deliver fate-sealing blow, his intentions had been unexpectedly seen through, and he was intercepted mid-attack. Now, he was forced into a passive state defending against Candy's attacks.

His plan had been to kill the Priest named Death Speech first. With the healer down, Elemental Sin, who was fighting the Serpentine Lizard, would soon follow. It was killing two birds with one stone.

He just never expected that he would be seen through in spite of his flawless Stealth.

This was the first time he failed an ambush since reincarnating!

After Candy intercepted him, the Priest successfully escaped. Since his sneak attack had failed, he activated Swift Retreat and pulled back rapidly.

「Boom!」He dodged the bolt of lightning just in the nick of time.

Following the bolt of lightning, he had been struck by a ray of light, though it had dealt no damage.

Standing in the distance, Su Yan's lips curved into smirk. Let's just see where you can hide to now that you've been marked!

As Nie Yan retreated, a bright floating mark had appeared floating above his head. No matter where he went, the mark would follow and reveal his position.

I've been marked! he inwardly cried out in alarm and hastily made his retreat.

Candy followed in pursuit but she was noticeably slower than him. After activating Swift Retreat, he had become too fast for her. She had no chance of catching up to him. The gap increasingly widened, and he soon broke away.

These players were simply too strong. It would be rather difficult

taking advantage of them. Thus, he had no choice but give up. He bolted out of the area and resumed his main objective. ✂ ✂ ✂

“Candy, how did you discover him?” Death Speech excitedly said, after being barely rescued from the clutches of death. That Thief had been really close to his position. If she was even a second later, not only would he have died but Eternal Sin would have as well.

“I didn’t. My Awareness isn’t that high. I was actually puzzled for quite a long time. Why hadn’t that Thief acted by now? There were already several good opportunities that had gone by. So, I put myself in his shoes and thought to myself, ‘When would be a good time to attack?’ When I saw Tall Guy sink into that quagmire, I guessed that was probably the best opportunity, which was why I had you cast Illuminate. I didn’t expect that I’d actually discover him...” Candy replied. If she been a step too late, Death Speech would have lost his life. Truthfully, that Thief’s Stealth could be described as perfect. The reason she had found him could be mostly attributed to good luck.

She peered past the thickets and into the distance. That Thief had long disappeared within Natlan Marsh’s fog.

Since Glimmer Mark had a duration of two minutes, if he were to come again within that time, they would immediately discover him. Thus, they could rest assured he wouldn’t mount another ambush.

Chapter 75 – Turn Of Events

Nie Yan fled the battle but he didn't immediately leave the area. Instead, he took a detour and circled round the perimeter before stopping to scan his surroundings. Eventually, he spotted a slope not too far in the distance. He dashed toward the slope and promptly arrived at its peak, whereupon he looked over in the direction of Eternal Sin and his team. Despite the somewhat low visibility, the light show of magic and clamor signalled that the battle was still ongoing and quite fierce.

At first, for the sake of preserving his life, he only planned to borrow their hand in killing the Serpentine Lizard and nothing else. However, since they tried to kill him, he wouldn't sit by idly and let them enjoy their meal in peace.

No, the temptation of obtaining the equipment dropped by a Level 7 Sub-Elite couldn't be abandoned so easily.

Thus, Candy and the others were unaware that Nie Yan hadn't actually fully retreated but was instead spying on them from atop a slope.

After believing they had finally driven that hateful Thief away, Eternal Sin and his team inwardly breathed a sigh of relief. Just a moment ago, he was in quite a panic due to being rooted by the quagmire. If anything had happened to the Priest in the rear, he would've been a goner as well. Luckily, Candy discovered that Thief before it was too late and helped them avert a disaster that could've wiped the team.

「Good work! You all did well,」Eternal Sin praised in the team chat.

「We were just lucky. That guy isn't so easy to deal with. We need to be careful if we ever encounter him in the future,」Candy replied, ending the celebrations early.

Eternal Sin assumed that with her skills, the other side wouldn't be able to gain the slightest advantage over her, but it was clear that assumption was wrong. That Thief was quite astonishing.

After forcing Nie Yan away, killing the Serpentine Lizard became much more relaxed.

「Bang! Bang! Bang!」The Serpentine Lizard was bombarded by several spells. Its body was charred and bloody, and many of its scales had been split open. This recent barrage shaved away a hundred and sixty health. The lizard was already at death's door; it simply lacked that one final nudge. Yet even in its death throes, the lizard did not give up and revealed its final trump card. It flickered its tongue and spat out a peculiar mist. Unlike the previous times, the mist was far denser and was pitch-black in colour rather than the normal green. It rapidly expanded and encompassed everything with a radius of twenty meters.

Su Yan (White Smoke) and the other Mages had hastily retreated when the mist began to expand. While Eternal Sin, who was at the epicenter of the skill, missed his attack and saw the shadow of the lizard bolt away.

The sudden change took him by surprise, causing him to be dazed for a brief moment before realizing what was going on.

「Over there! It's trying to escape!」Eternal Sin roared.

This was the first time they had come across a Sub-Elite that ran away when at low health. However, it didn't mean they had never heard of them. Several Elite-class field bosses would also use a skill to try and flee after falling below a certain health.

「Where?」asked one of the Mages.

Under the cover of the mist, their vision was completely blocked and it was impossible for them to find their target.

Su Yan suddenly saw a shadow flash past some bushes. She raised her staff and prepared to cast a spell. Just as she spoke the first syllable to the incantation...

「System: Target is outside of spell range.」

She helplessly cancelled the incantation.

By the time the mist dissipated, any traces of the Serpentine Lizard would have long disappeared!

「It escaped...」Su Yan lowered her staff.

「In which direction?」Eternal Sin asked. They had poured enormous amounts of effort into getting the Serpentine Lizard's health bar to barely a sliver of health. If it escaped just like that, wouldn't that mean all their hard work had gone to waste?

「Over there!」



At an earlier point in time.

As Nie Yan silently observed the battle from the slope, a black mist emerged and covered his view, causing his heart to jump in excitement. It's about to make a break for it! Just as he expected, from within the mist, he saw a shadow escaping towards the southeast.

The reason he didn't entirely leave the area was because he had known the Serpentine Lizard would try and escape. So, he camped out atop this slope in order to cut off its escape.

The low-health Serpentine Lizard wouldn't be able to run too far, around eight hundred meters at most. He planned to kill it before Eternal Sin and his team arrived and snatch the dropped items for himself.

He pondered for a moment, calculating the most optimal route, then bolted down the slope towards the nearest path and rushed to intercept the Serpentine Lizard.

There was an old line from a poem: “Making a beautiful dress only to give to others.” The line held a deeper meaning. It referred to others who, despite working hard and toiling for hours, gained no benefits and instead given it to others. This would be an accurate portrayal of Eternal Sin and his team.

Nie Yan activated a Basic Haste Scroll and ran like the wind as he traversed the marsh.

The marsh was full of wandering Marsh Monitors. Therefore, he inevitably ran past quite a few of them, who would aggro onto him and chase. Though in the end, he was too fast for them and quickly broke away. After a while, they would de-aggro and resume roaming around.

After travelling for a while, he heard explosions in the distance and wrinkled his brows. There are others in this area?

As he drew closer, the figures of another group of players entered his sights. There were six of them in total, and they appeared to be training in the marsh.

However, he didn't slow down and soon entered their sights. Seeing him approach, the group eyed him suspiciously.

「It's a Thief! Everyone, be careful.」

All six players raised their guards.

「He's probably just passing by.」the leader of the group said. If this Thief really wanted to ambush them, he wouldn't have emerged in front of them and exposed himself in plain sight.

「I think he's just aggroing monsters for his team.」

These six players remained prudent and didn't take the initiative to intercept him. If by chance, this Thief belonged to a team and they barred his way, it would bring them unnecessary trouble.

Nie Yan had more important fish to fry, so he didn't want to get in a tangle with these players unnecessarily. Plus, they didn't pose much of a threat. He ran past them and disappeared within the thickets.

Those six players were astonished by his speed as he dashed past them. He had closed the distance between them in almost an instant.

「What kind of speed is that?」

That Thief was simply too fast. Even if they had tried to intercept him, not only would they likely fail to stop him, they would have probably ended up worse for wear as well. These six players felt like they dodged a bullet.

“Forget it, let's go back to levelling.”

“Hey Yi Wang (Forgotten), do you have any more health potions? I ran out. Share some with me.”

The Thief’s unexpected appearance was just a minor incident for them, so they quickly went back to training.

As Nie Yan travelled further through the marsh, he finally began finding traces of the Serpentine Lizard.

Finally found you. So I just need to keep going this way! He accelerated his pace. There were too many players in this area, and he didn’t want the Serpentine Lizard falling into another person’s hands.

After running several dozen meters, he caught sight of the Serpentine Lizard resting behind some bushes.

Likewise, the Serpentine Lizard noticed him as well. Its scarlet tongue flickered in, hissing as it watched him attentively. Like a lamp that had spend that last of its oil, there was no more strength left in its body. The final sprint had put it in a weakened state. By now, it no longer had the ability to flee.

Nie Yan retrieved his crossbow, took aim, and fired.「Whoosh! Whoosh! Whoosh!」Three bolts went flying through the air.

-16

The Serpentine Lizard let out a mournful cry as it writhed in pain.

Nie Yan put away the crossbow, retrieved his daggers, then dashed toward it and dealt the final blow.

-51

A bright red damage value rose above the lizard's head. It struggled briefly before going limp and collapsing on the ground.

"I saw it running over this way!"

"Look, I see its footprints on the ground!"

The several voices belonged to Eternal Sin and his teammates. However, they had arrived too late. Nie Yan stooped down to the ground and picked up the item that dropped from the Serpentine Lizard's corpse. Hmmm... It's a skill book.

After passing through some thickets, Eternal Sin and his team finally arrived and almost immediately noticed his presence.

"It's that Thief!"

“Stop him!”

A spell came flying straight towards him.

Goodbye~ He faintly smiled and gazed at Eternal Sin, Candy, and the others before bounding over the shrubbery and disappearing from their sight.

Eternal Sin and his team anxiously went in pursuit but by the time they arrived at the lizard's corpse, all signs of Nie Yan had long disappeared. They turned to looked at each other and saw the similarly dismayed expression in their teammate's eyes.

It took them an enormous amount of effort to get the Serpentine Lizard to low health. Yet somehow, it still ended up in that Thief's hands. Could it be that he had never left the area and was waiting for another opportunity to appear the whole time? If that was the case, he must have possessed a terrifying level of patience.

Chapter 76 – Ancient City Of Sulgata

This time around, the final victor of the battle was Nie Yan. As for Eternal Sin, Candy and the rest of their team, they had played all their cards already. Besides holding a grudge, there was nothing they could do.

After fleeing from Eternal Sin and his team, Nie Yan resumed his main objective and headed for the ruins of Sulgata. As he ran towards his destination, he retrieved the skill book that he had obtained from the Serpentine Lizard from his bag. Since he had been in a hurry to escape, he hadn't checked to see what it actually was.

Dammit! It's just a Revive skill book!

He couldn't help letting out a sigh. Though, in truth, his luck wasn't actually bad. This skill book was a vital necessity for teams if they wanted to progress in the future, and the sooner they obtained it, the better. Due to this, the current market price was ludicrous. Even if a player listed it for one gold, there would still be plenty of teams making a mad scramble to obtain it.

Skill Book: Revive

Description: Allows a Priest to revive a fallen comrade.

Requirement: Incantation, Gesture, and Material

Skill Attribute: Revive a fallen comrade; can only be cast while outside of combat. This skill requires 10 seconds to channel.

Cooldown: 30 s

User Restriction: Priest; can only be learned by a member of the Righteous faction.

He skimmed through its description before storing it back into his bag. It would become quite valuable to him in the future, so he didn't plan on selling it. Besides, he wasn't short on money either.

After traversing through a vast stretch of thickets, he eventually encountered a ruined city constructed at the center of the marshland. As he approached the city's perimeter, his gaze fell on the once towering walls that had been eroded by the elements. Upon closer inspection, he could still see traces of its former majesty. Looming past the walls stood an imposing pyramid constructed out of stone slabs, placed at the city center. Even from afar, he could see various characters from the Dark Era carved on each slab, every single one of them radiating an ancient aura.

This ancient stronghold experienced countless battles and wars. No one knew what year or what month it happened, but the city had long since been devoid of life. All that remained were the aged pillars and walls that whistled a lonely ballad as the wind passed through them.

No mistake, I've found the right place!

Nie Yan circled the outer perimeter of the city for some time until he found the main gates.

He sorted out his inventory before setting foot inside the city gates. As he crossed the threshold from the gates into the passageway, he was met with the sight of countless ruins. Moreover, the instant he entered the walls, the sky suddenly turned dark. It was almost like he had been transported into another dimension. Darkness enshrouded everything, and he could no longer see outside the city. There was only the eerie sight of the ancient ruins in front of him.

「System: You've discovered the Sulgata Rampart!」

He saw rows upon rows of dilapidated buildings that led to the giant pyramid off in the distance. As he peered through the passageway at the main road, he saw the ghastly bones of the dead littering the pathways, streets, and sidewalks.

Suddenly, he felt a cold chill assault the back of his neck. A cold wind blew, and the scattered bones began moving on their own. Seeing this, he hurriedly climbed to a higher vantage point.

Shortly after reaching a reasonable height, the countless bones of varying sizes began to assemble together. There were some of short stature, seemingly belonging to Dwarves. Another group looked almost reptilian in nature, if you ignored the enormous bony wings that were growing out of their backs. Presumably, these belonged to the Dragon race. The rest belonged to the Human and Giant races.

These undead were what remained of an ancient battle. Countless lives belonging to various races were lost inside this stronghold. Their souls couldn't move on to the afterlife, so they persisted through the ages and lingered by their remains. As soon as they sensed the breath of the living, they would reanimate their bodies and seek to exterminate its source without fail.

Nie Yan scanned over the nearest ones using Transcendent Insight.

Skeleton Sentinel (Extremely Frail): Level 10

Health: 120/120

Skeleton Mage (Extremely Frail): Level 10

Health: 80/80

Skeleton Ripper (Extremely Frail): Level 10

Health: 150/150

The skeletons had small health pools, and their attacks weren't powerful. In addition, they possessed the Extremely Frail modifier, so the level disparity between him and the mobs could be ignored. Even so, their sheer numbers couldn't be underestimated; the entire passageway was filled to the brim with skeletons. Moreover, since they were undead, they couldn't bleed nor be stunned. Stealth was also useless against them since they detected the living through the presence of life, not sight.

He hurriedly distanced himself from these undead. If they discovered him, they would charge over in a rush to exterminate him.

After putting some space between them, he slowly made his way forward. Eventually, he encountered a lone Skeleton Sentinel. He unsheathed his daggers and dashed in. Opening with an Assassinate, he then followed up with Vital Strike and instantly smashed it into smithereens.

「System: You've successfully slain a Skeleton Sentinel. +200% experience for killing a monster above your level. You've received 230 experience points.」

Though these skeletons were relatively weak, the experience they gave was quite decent.

Just as Nie Yan killed the lone Skeleton Sentinel, a group of Skeleton Sentinels and Skeleton Rippers from across the passage noticed his presence and bolted towards him. There were over a dozen of them running at him like an incoming wave. The Skeleton Rippers were the first to approach as they brandished their blades. The Skeleton Mages behind them raised their staffs. Crimson and pale-white energy coalesced together, forming an otherworldly blaze, and a rain of ice and lightning magic followed as well.

God dammit! Why are there so many of them!? he inwardly cried. After a quick glance behind him, he discovered the exit had been sealed off as well. There were skeletons everywhere. He fled from the fight and dashed toward a fork in the path.

Although their numbers were great, their movements were clumsy and awkward. Thus, if he didn't act carelessly, they wouldn't pose too much of a threat to him.

「Bang! Bang! Bang!」Several spells exploded by his side as he dashed around the corner and escaped the Skeleton Mages' attack range. As he fled from the skeletons, he observed the path ahead of him and noticed another mob of enemies aggressively charging in his direction.

He couldn't retreat since the rear path was sealed off by skeletons, and he couldn't advance into the charging skeletons. Nie Yan quickly looked at the walls beside him. They were roughly five meters high, and littered with footholds due to their eroded state. He leapt into the air and scaled the walls.

After reaching the top, he gently landed on the other side. There were several Skeleton Mages scattered around the vicinity of this path. In addition, many bones littered the ground, seemingly yet to reanimate.

He didn't dare to be neglectful and dashed towards one of the Skeleton Mages with his daggers raised.

After a brief exchange, the Skeleton Mage collapsed to the ground and shattered into fragments.

The other Skeleton Mages had already noticed his presence and were in the middle of casting their spells. However, he was

lightning fast and quickly finished them off one by one. Afterward, as he began picking up the items that dropped, the bones on the ground trembled and began reassembling themselves.

He didn't stay any longer and promptly fled towards the exit.

However, as his feet stepped past a few tiles on the floor, he felt a slight vibration beneath his feet. Though it had been extremely minute, he still detected it immediately.

Traps!

He hastily jumped to the side.「Boom!」The tile he had stepped on exploded, sending debris flying everywhere. Several of the nearby skeletons had been caught by the explosion and were blown away. The shock from the blast destroyed them as they collapsed into a pile of bone fragments.

Some of the shrapnel from the explosion also struck his body and caused several damage values to rise above his head.

-12

-13

-15

He broke out in a cold sweat as he lay sprawled on the ground. These landmines were extremely terrifying. If he had taken the full brunt of that explosion, he wouldn't have even left a complete

corpse behind.

Although the landmines were dangerous, with a single explosion being able to instantly kill a Thief, there was a slight two-second window before they actually detonated. As long as he maintained his awareness, he could pass through safely without a hitch.

Chapter 77 – Cursed Skull

Nie Yan climbed back to his feet and dashed toward his destination, clearing out the skeletons as he travelled along the narrow, twisting passages of the Sulgata Rampart. After clearing out several passages, and finishing off the last nearby Skeleton Mage, his experience bar had risen by two percent. Along the way he had picked up many items, though he still hadn't had the time to sort them out yet.

As he advanced onwards, he eventually encountered an area with no skeletal remains. Finally... This ought to be a safe area.

He sat down and began sorting through the items he had recently picked up: twenty-seven coppers and two subpar pieces of Bronze equipment.

Just as he was about to close his inventory menu, a shabby-looking scroll at the bottom corner of the window caught his eye. Only then did he recall that he had obtained such an item. He must have picked it up from that Skeleton Mage he destroyed earlier.

Written on this yellowed scroll were the ancient characters of the Dragon race. It read: "Ancient spirits awaken from within the shadows."

It was a special one-use item called a Spirit Summoning Scroll. As the name suggests, the player could summon an ancient spirit by activating this scroll. However, there were downsides. In the event that the player failed to control the spirit, they would be devoured

in turn.

It was quite an uncommon item. In Sulgata, the likelihood of it dropping was one in two thousand. So, if one were lucky, they'd obtain it every so often while killing skeletons in the area. The ghost summoned by this item wasn't all that strong. At best, it could be used as a meat-shield. However, in an area like Sulgata that was filled with countless roaming skeletons, this item was surprisingly handy.

Though, there was a slight problem. His low level would make it difficult for him to control the summoned ghost, which meant that it was highly possible it would try to devour him.

Hmm... should I use it or not?

Nie Yan pondered for a moment. If I'm capable of controlling it, then I'll have a meat shield at my disposal. If I fail, however, my only loss will be a scroll.

With those thoughts in mind, he turned and surveyed his surroundings. It's pretty spacious here, and for the time being, there won't be any monsters to disturb me.

After thinking for a bit, he bit into his thumb and pressed it onto the scroll, using his blood to draw a dark red mark.

As his blood gradually seeped into its fibres, the scroll began to radiate with a faint glow.

The ancient seals written on the scroll were slowly beginning to activate.

Soon, a dark ghastly energy emerged from the scroll and gradually condensed into the form of a person. The spirit he summoned was a Ghost Assassin. It appeared translucent and held a shadowy dagger in its hands.

Ghost Assassin: Level 10

Health: 230/230

Its stats actually weren't bad for a Level 10 summon. In his previous timeline, he had also used this item when he was Level 10 or so. In those days, the price of a Spirit Summoning Scroll was about eight silvers, which wasn't considered to be very expensive as the average player was able to buy them. If he were to sell the scroll at the marketplace now, then considering its current rarity, it would probably go for around ten silvers.

The Ghost Assassin's combat strength was decent, and it had a summon duration of thirty minutes. It also possessed three skills: Shroud, Concussive Blow, and Self-Detonate. With this summon at his side, his levelling speed would certainly increase significantly.

After being summoned, the Ghost Assassin didn't move at all. Instead, it scanned the surroundings with its cold eyes.

Nie Yan attempted to control the ghost, but it didn't budge an

inch. He tried once more, and this time, it actually moved.

I succeeded? His heart filled with pleasant surprise. With the Ghost Assassin by his side, he'd have an extra hand to help fight the skeletons.

Contrary to his expectations, however, the Ghost Assassin's dagger flashed with a cold glint as it suddenly dashed toward him.

Shit, this asshole is trying to devour me!

This wasn't entirely unexpected, though, as he never had high hopes to begin with when he summoned it. His level was simply too low. Moreover, the ghost wasn't merely a level or two above him, it was five entire levels above him. Controlling it couldn't have been an easy matter.

In the event that the player failed to control the summoned creature, they would be the first thing the summon would aggro onto.

Disregarding the fact that it could be stunned as it sped toward him. Nie Yan pulled back rapidly and dodged the Ghost Assassin's oncoming attack. Then, seeing an opening, he quickly pounced forward and went on the offensive.

"Vital Strike!" Nie Yan shouted out as he slashed his dagger across the Ghost Assassin's neck.

Yet, the attack seemed to be ineffective as its shadowy neck simply restored itself almost instantly after being cut. Brandishing the dagger in its hand, that ghastly being dashed forward and answered with an attack of its own.

Nie Yan was forced back onto the defensive and had to constantly retreat as they fought. Their positions were ever changing as they moved about the area. This ghost was much stronger than those frail skeletons. Thankfully, he had only summoned a Ghost Assassin and not something tankier. So although he was five levels below it, his damage wasn't insignificant.

-23

-25

Two damage values rose above the Ghost Assassin's head.

After losing a sizable chunk of health, the ghost's body began to sway and fade, eventually disappearing from sight.

Nie Yan had lost sight of his target. No matter how hard he concentrated while searching, he was unable to detect its position. The level discrepancy between them was just too large, so he was couldn't see through the Ghost Assassin's Shroud.

He cautiously retreated to a nearby wall, then pressed his back against the stone so he would only have to face attacks from the front.

Suddenly, the nearby shadows flickered and a silhouette emerged at his side. The dagger in its hands deftly struck towards his head.

The Ghost Assassin was also capable of using Concussive Blow, and Nie Yan was a goner if he let himself get stunned.

Seeing the dagger approach, he quickly sidestepped the attack and avoided being stunned.

But just as he dodged the attack, the Ghost Assassin turned its blade back and lashed out at Nie Yan again, though this time, its dagger transformed into three flashes of light before it struck.

-52, -57, -56

The unexpected chain of attacks cost him the greater half of his health. Nie Yan hurriedly pulled back, just narrowly evading the Ghost Assassin's second flurry of attacks, then leapt away to put some distance between them.

He took out a Basic Health Potion and poured its contents down his throat, instantly restoring thirty health. Seeing the Ghost Assassin draw near, Nie Yan swung out his right arm and attempted to hit it in the head with a Concussive Blow

The Ghost Assassin's head split in two from the force of the strike, but rapidly began recovering to its original shape.

While its head recovered, the ghost halted its movements for

several seconds. And those few seconds were all Nie Yan needed to unload enough attacks to bring it down to a third of its health.

He proved to be a bit too greedy with his attacks, though, as he continued attacking even after the stun had worn off. He didn't have time to react as the Ghost Assassin slashed at his chest.

-76

A critical hit!

The attack reduced his health to thirteen percent, leaving him badly frightened. Without sparing a second, he quickly fell back with Swift Retreat and applied a Combat Bandage.

+20... +20... +20...

The Ghost Assassin had no intentions to let him rest as it rushed towards him with a dagger aimed right for his head.

Nie Yan dodge rolled to the side, evading the attack, then swiftly retaliated with Assassinate. His dagger slashed across the Ghost Assassin's chest.

His attack also dealt a critical hit and brought the Ghost Assassin down to five percent health.

The Ghost Assassin suddenly let out a cry as its body turned a dark shade of red and began to rapidly expand and violently surge with energy.

It wants to self-destruct!

The explosion from a Ghost Assassin self-destructing was especially terrifying. He had been caught in such an explosion before in his past, and it caused him to lose over eighty percent of his health. But that was when he was Level 10. As a Level 5, he probably wouldn't even be left with a complete corpse.

Judging that it was too late to escape the blast radius, he rushed at the Ghost Assassin and planted his dagger in its throat.

Vital Strike!

The Ghost Assassin's health fell to zero, and its Self-Detonate was cancelled. As it dissolved into thin air, it let out a single mournful cry.

"Hah... Hah... Hah..." Nie Yan gasped for air. That bastard was more difficult than I thought.

As he recovered his stamina, his eyes happened to glance over the ground. It actually dropped something!

Although the Ghost Assassin was a summon, as soon as it broke away from the summoner's control, it would become

indistinguishable from common mobs. This meant that it could drop items upon death like any other mob.

Nie Yan bent down and grasped the item that had dropped. Upon further inspection, it appeared to be a skull that was roughly the size of his palm. Numerous delicate patterns and designs were carved onto the top of the skull, and there was even a gem embedded into it

Cursed Skull (Fate Item)

Chapter 78 – Fate Dice

Fate Items were spread by the powers of the Dark Faction. They were extremely rare items and often possessed unimaginable effects.

This information came from the dark region known as the Underworld, an area filled with pestilence and blight. There, countless creatures roamed amongst the lands dotted with ancient tombs. In addition to that, the land was also where the undead flourished, being home to wraiths, skeletons, ghouls, and all other sorts of dark entities. Aside from evil Necromancers, who beckoned the unliving with their magic, no others could approach this land.

The Spirit Summoning Scroll was an item used to bypass countless layers of earth and summon spiritual entities directly from the Underworld, most of which had never seen the light of day.

Some Fate Items served as catalysts for Necromancers to summon spirits, while others were evil items that contained powerful curses. Though no matter what their use was, not even Necromancers were fully capable of controlling these items as they desired.

Just like their name suggested, the outcome of using a Fate Item could only be left up to fate.

Nie Yan read over the Cursed Skull's description.

In order to activate its effect, the player was required to crush the skull, whereupon three Fate Dice would be summoned. Once activated, there was no turning back. The player must roll each die; otherwise, they would be cursed. If a four or higher was rolled, then the player would receive a reward. If the player rolled a three or lower, however, they would be inflicted with a curse based on the result—the lower the roll, the heavier the penalty. Inversely, the higher the roll, the greater the reward.

Be it a reward or a curse, opportunity and risk were two sides of the same coin.

Additionally, the Cursed Skull would disappear if it wasn't used within five minutes.

After he finished reading the description, Nie Yan felt an indescribable sensation in his chest. The outcome of using this item was hard to predict. This was because the summoned dice were rolled by the system, which meant it was impossible to cheat, and thus the end result depended entirely on luck. This meant each roll had a fifty percent chance to be a boon and an equal chance to be a curse.

Nie Yan calmly sat on the ground and started eating a loaf of bread to replenish his health, though his state of mind was anything but tranquil.

Gaaaah! It all depends on my luck! Even he couldn't say for sure whether his luck was good or bad. While pondering about what his

next action would be, Nie Yan closely examined the skull in the palm of his hands. The skull had a gem embedded in each eye, and they were flickering with a ghastly light. As he stared into the eyes, he felt as though they were staring back, watching him.

It was calling to him, telling him that it was simply providing him an opportunity. As for whether he dared to challenge fate, that choice was solely up to him.

The future was filled with uncertainty.

Nie Yan firmly grasped the skull in his hand, despite still being entirely hesitant about what he should do. If he delayed his choice any longer, then the Fate Item would vanish without a trace.

He endlessly questioned himself to the point of torture. In such a situation, no one would dare make a rash decision.

As the minutes and seconds continued to pass by, he suddenly recalled an old folktale in the game. It was about an old man who arrived in a village carrying a sealed chest. The old man entered the village square and told the residents that he would unlock the chest and give all the contents within it to whomever paid him a silver. Yet in the end, not even a single villager was willing to spend the money for the chest. Eventually, the old man left; however, from then on the residents of that village would often lose sleep as they tossed and turned in bed, recalling the old and his mysterious chest. They regretted not paying the silver and getting to the bottom of that chest.

The moral of the story was quite simple, and it applied to his current situation rather well. If he didn't use this Cursed Skull and let it fade away, then perhaps he would end up like those villagers, endlessly thinking back to one event with regret.

There's no harm in trying my luck... Nie Yan firmed his resolve and gradually exerted more strength on the skull in his right hand. 「Crack!」It began to split under the pressure as he gritted his teeth. 「Pop!」the Cursed Skull was crushed into pieces.

The next twenty seconds passed in complete silence, as if everything in the vicinity had been frozen in time.

Suddenly, an enormous bone-white, six-sided Fate Die emerged in the sky, suspended directly above Nie Yan. Each face had a different number carved into it; one to six appeared in ancient, crimson red characters belonging to the Spirit race.

It awaited his attempt to challenge fate!

After taking in a deep breath, Nie Yan slowly extended his right arm. As his hand hovered over one of the floating die, it began to spin at an incredible speed, with the number facing him changing at a rapid pace.

The scene was easily capable of making a person's head spin from dizziness.

“Stop!” As soon as he called out, the rapidly spinning Fate Die

immediately came to a rest, and the number was revealed before him. The bolded character was in a shade of red that resembled blood.

Shit... I'm out of luck.

Almost immediately, a sinister, malicious energy covered his entire body and slowly drained his Strength.

「Curse (Pestilence of the Frail): Your Strength has been permanently reduced by 10.」

The terrifying curse sent chills down his spine and caused his heart to freeze over. Even if he was a top expert, losing ten Strength was still incredibly difficult to bear.

Each stat point was as precious as the next. Not to mention that, outside of leveling, permanently raising a stat by even a single point was an extremely challenging task.

To Nie Yan, it seemed as though the scarlet number painted on the die had transformed into the slithering tongue of a devil; flamboyant and alluring, it gazed at him in a mocking manner.

The die had only landed on a three yet it had permanently reduced his Strength by ten points. He had a hard time imagining what sort of severe curse he would've come under if it had landed on a two or even possibly a one.

Even worse, he still had two more rolls to go. He didn't dare think about the consequences that potentially awaited him. Would he end up a cripple? In that case, he would have to delete his character and start all over again.

His fate was unknown.

And because it was unknown, it was all the more terrifying to think of.

However, he couldn't back out now. The next Fate Die was quietly floating in the air. If he didn't roll before a certain amount of time passed, he would be automatically cursed regardless.

Was he regretting his decision? No. To be more accurate, he didn't have the time for regret. He hovered his right hand over the second die, causing it to rapidly spin in the air. He didn't know if the next roll was going to be a dazzling reward or a debilitating curse. Though, no matter the outcome, he was unable to escape this trial of fate.

What if it's another curse...? No, it definitely won't be!

"Stop!" Nie Yan called out. The tone of his voice revealed his faltering resolve compared to earlier, but he still pressed on regardless.

The ivory-white Fate Die was akin to a snake coiling itself around his heart. The sound of the die stopping practically caused his

heart to stop beating.

Five! It landed on a five! Then, a white radiance descended over him, and he felt as though a huge weight had been lifted. It's not a curse!

As long as it's not a curse, then it's okay!

Nie Yan regained his calm and checked the system announcement, whereupon he immediately checked his skill window. There was an extra skill in one of the slots!

Undead Rite (Undead Temple Magic – Rank 1): Sacrifice 30% health to summon an undead for three hours. 20% chance summoned undead will be directly under the player's control. The player can only summon a maximum of 5 undead at one time. Cooldown: 30 s

Apparently, where there were sacrifices, there were also [gains](#). When he saw Undead Rite, he couldn't help but feel excited. It was actually Temple Magic! Elemental Temple Magic and Undead Temple Magic were both classified as high-level skills. After losing ten points of Strength, this seemed like a reasonable return. After all, since he had the Chapter of Courage, it was possible to make up for the permanent loss in Strength after twenty-five levels. In addition, this rare skill was a priceless treasure! In the future, he'd have an advantage when levelling and traversing areas filled with undead!

Unfortunately, that was where the celebrations would come to an

end. The last die floating in the air caused him to gaze at it with a complex expression. This item could truly allow a player to reach the heavens in a single bound. At the same time, however, it could also consign a player to the deepest layers of hell.

Chapter 79 – Sulgata Colosseum

Fate tended to operate in an unfathomable way. It could grant a person a short respite during their time of suffering, only to send them straight to eternal damnation afterwards.

Life, or death? Nobody knew for certain what fate had in store for them.

If he wasn't willing to take on the risks, he wouldn't have crushed the skull in the first place.

Nie Yan forcefully calmed his mind and extended his hand over the die. A bountiful reward, or a malignant curse, the final result of his gamble would remain shrouded in mystery until this final die came to a stop.

The Fate Die began to spin and tumble in the air as his unknown fate beckoned to him.

Seeing the die rotating at a dizzying speed, he broke out in a cold sweat. Please... Please don't let it be a curse!

“Stop!” He felt like his heart was going to explode out of his chest.

The die immediately halted, and the strange demonic character revealed before his eyes was shockingly... a five! Another five! Perhaps five was his lucky number!

The surprising result of the final roll left Nie Yan feeling an indescribable amount of bliss. His only hope was that he wouldn't roll another curse. He never actually thought that he would receive a reward, much less what the reward might be.

After all, rolling three Fate Dice wasn't something an ordinary player could afford. This extremely dangerous gamble made him feel as though his heart had been constricted from all the stress.

「System: You've received Pandora's Box.」

Pandora's Box (Fate Item)

What the hell! Another Fate Item!? The first one had already given him enough of a headache, yet he was given a second one! If this one was just like the first and could cause him to be cursed, then he'd rather have it disappear. After experiencing the fickle nature of the Fate Dice, he vowed to never partake in such a terrifying gamble again.

Partaking in a dangerous gamble like that just once was more than enough, so he wouldn't regret letting the second chance disappear.

Pandora's Box was a perfectly shaped, silver-gray cube. On each face was a different carving depicting various things such as a sinister skull, a fiendish devil, an angel, and so on. Not only were the carvings both vivid and lifelike, they were also meticulously detailed.

In addition, these carvings seemed to be imbued with a peculiar energy.

Nie Yan examined Pandora's Box a bit more closely. Fortunately for him, it didn't fall under the same category as the Cursed Skull. In fact, it was actually quite the treasure!

Pandora's Box (Fate Item)

Item Description

➤Insert three pieces of equipment of equal grade into Pandora's Box for a 10% chance of obtaining a piece of equipment of a higher grade. All pieces of equipment are destroyed upon failure.

➤Insert a piece of equipment and a Fortune Gem for a chance of raising its grade by one. Upon failure, the piece of equipment is demoted by a grade.

➤Counter (cycle = 3 seconds) begins when activated. If cycle number is even, Luck +5. If cycle is odd, Luck -5.

User Restriction: Can be used by all factions.

This item was actually quite a rarity. Although he had heard of such an item in the past, Nie Yan had never actually come across one himself. In addition, it didn't lose out one bit to Legendary-grade equipment in value. He could put three pieces of Gold equipment inside Pandora's Box for a ten percent chance of getting a piece of Dark Gold equipment in return. Of course, there was a ninety percent chance of failure as well, which meant the loss of all the items he had inserted, but the potential return was well worth the risk. For example, if he inserted three pieces of Dark Gold equipment into the box, he had a chance of obtaining a piece of Legendary equipment! The slight caveat was that very few players would actually dare to stake three pieces of Dark Gold equipment on such a gamble. After all, equipment of that rarity was extremely expensive and hard to obtain.

The second method allowed the player to raise the grade of their equipment by using Fortune Gems. These gems were expensive items created by Jewelcrafters that increased the success rate of inserting gems into equipment sockets. Usually their market price averaged around five silvers, but the real challenge was actually

finding them being listed up for sale. Moreover, most of those who bought these gems couldn't bear to actually use them.

The item's ability to affect Luck was also very useful. It could influence the drop rate, crafting success rate, etc... Five points might not sound like much, but it was actually quite a significant amount of Luck. It could increase the drop rate when killing monsters by two hundred percent, crafting success rate by one-fifth, and so on. As for the inverse when the player's Luck was reduced by five points... Let's just say that, at that point, anything that could go wrong, was guaranteed to go wrong.

This item would basically divide the player's time into two periods: one where they would be the luckiest man in the world, and one where they would be the most unfortunate soul in existence.

Nie Yan pondered for a moment. It wasn't necessarily a lucky item, but he could try his best to trigger events when the timer was on an even cycle. Even though three seconds passed by in the blink of an eye, he was confident he would be able to gauge the timing properly.

This blessing had arrived so abruptly that he had yet to figure out what item grade Pandora's Box belonged to. This was quite the conundrum, one he'd certainly need to slowly research lest he miss any details. But that was a task for the future, right now he needed to get moving. After standing up, Nie Yan stored Pandora's Box away in his bag. It seemed that in this gamble, the risks had brought more reward than punishment.

Realizing that he was one step closer to understanding one of the many mysteries of fate, Nie Yan felt his heart beat fluctuate.

As soon as the Fate Dice disappeared, time in the area seemed to start moving again. The frozen skeletons in the distance resumed their movements and once again began closing in with the intent of surrounding him.

Many skeletons who had seen Nie Yan while patrolling the area attempted to get closer to him, but upon drawing near, they simply stopped in their tracks. It wasn't until the Fate Dice disappeared that they finally resumed their pursuit. Because of this, a large mob of skeletons had gradually built up nearby. When Nie Yan looked over, he saw them packed tighter than sardines in a tin can.

“So many skeletons!” Nie Yan didn't dare stay here any longer and hastily fled towards a nearby wall.

The outer district of Sulgata resembled an immense labyrinth. He didn't even know his own location. He was simply relying on his own judgement as he moved towards the gigantic pyramid that stood at the center of the city.

While navigating the city, the distant pyramid made for a convenient landmark.

The skeletons didn't stop their pursuit. As soon as the Skeleton Mages got within range, they raised their staffs and rained magic down upon his location.

Nie Yan leaped into the air, and just as he set foot on top of the wall...

「Boom! Boom! Boom!」The volley of spells battered the wall and sent a large amount of debris flying everywhere.

-21, -27, -25...

Numerous damage values rose above Nie Yan's head, bringing his health down to a third after only a single round of spells. There were just too many Skeleton Mages below him.

After drinking a Health Potion, he jumped down to the other side.

His landing was graceful, but that didn't mean he was out of danger yet. The only way Nie Yan saw to shake off the skeletons was to deviate from his current path, which would bring him further and further from the pyramid at the center. However, he had no other choice. He had to lose the skeletons that were pursuing him.

Nie Yan eventually came across an opening that seemed to lead to one of the city's public squares. Even further off in the distance, he was able to make out a colosseum. It must've surely been an imposing sight back in its prime, but now it was nothing more than ruins—surely the work of several centuries of erosion. Even though it was now in ruins, when Nie Yan stared at the dilapidated relic from a long gone era, he was still able to imagine how it would've looked in the past.

「System: You've discovered Sulgata Colosseum!」

So it was the city's colosseum. Nie Yan had been through this area in the past, but he never actually took the time to look around and explore this colosseum.

While making his way through the plaza, Nie Yan suddenly felt something give underneath his foot. It's a pitfall! He had been too distracted by the imposing sight of the colosseum in the distance, and didn't bother to examine the area for traps. Thus, in his carelessness, he ended up stepping right into a trap.

Nie Yan suddenly leapt forward in an attempt to jump away before the ground beneath him completely collapsed. To his shock, however, he discovered that the pitfall trap he had stumbled into was gigantic. It spanned over twenty meters wide. How could he possibly leap that far away?

Before he could get away, the ground collapsed, sending Nie Yan into a free fall.

He didn't know how deep the pitfall was, so he readied his Featherfall Gem. If the pitfall was too high, he'd have no choice but to use it to prevent himself from dying from fall damage.

「Thud!」However, those worries seemed to be unnecessary as he landed on the ground and only a twenty-six rose above his head. It seemed the pitfall wasn't too deep, only around ten meters at most.

Chapter 80 – Controlling The Undead

Nie Yan had fallen into a square room surrounded by prison cells. Above him hung several Night Pearls which illuminated the area below. As he took a good look at his surroundings, he then realized just what kind of place he had fallen into.

He was likely dropped into an underground dungeon. On either side of him were two enclosures with stout metal bars which firmly prevented escape. As he peered through the gaps and into the enclosures, he saw a gigantic set of bones in each one. The bone piles were over four meters high, and he could see an enormous tail, skeletal wings, and a lizard-like skull mixed in. These two skeletal remains had most likely been dragons when they were alive!

Since this dungeon wasn't too far from the Sulgata Colosseum, it seemed these dragons were forced to fight in the gladiatorial arena.

As prisoners of the colosseum, all of their freedoms were wrested away, and they were made into tools of entertainment for the nobility. When Sulgata finally fell, they were most likely abandoned and kept locked in their cells, left to starve, and eventually turning into skeletons.

While Nie Yan was lost in thought, the two bone piles suddenly trembled and slowly began to reassemble.

「[Roaaaar! Roaar!](#)」

The two skeletons let out indignant cries which reverberated across the entire dungeon. They resembled two vicious beasts as they charged at Nie Yan.

「Bang!」The iron bars of their cells violently shuddered after being rammed by their large skeletal frames. Their cages slightly contorted as the bars had been bent askew from the collisions.

The skeletal dragons cried out furiously as they repeatedly slammed into their enclosure, causing the metal bars to warp just a little more each time. Nie Yan felt their cages wouldn't be able to hold on much longer due to the continuous impacts.

These dragons probably held great resentment and vexation during their passing. Thus, their souls were unable to move on, and they became undead. They were much stronger than ordinary undead, and their dark red bones possessed a metallic lustre.

Nie Yan used Transcendent Insight to examine these skeletal dragons.

Undead Dragon Gladiator (Leader): Level 10

Health 600/600

They were Leader-class monsters, and they shared a common trait among most skeletal undead. Their healths were much lower in comparison to their living counterparts. Even then, these two Level 10 Leader-class monsters still weren't something he could handle.

The Undead Dragons could easily kill him.

He glanced at the walls of the pitfall above him; it was too high. It would be impossible for him to climb out of it even with the aid of the Ring of Woven Silk. As he looked around for somewhere to escape, his eyes happened to fall on a tunnel in the distance that appeared to be the dungeon's exit. However, the tunnel was sealed off by an iron gate. The gate was firmly clamped shut by a giant padlock. He didn't have any thoughts of smashing the gate open, it simply wasn't possible. He wasn't like those Undead Dragons who possessed large bodies and robust frames.

After the repeated collisions from the Undead Dragons, many metals bars were visibly damaged and bent out of shape. The cages were becoming increasingly weaker with every passing second, and eventually, they collapsed, freeing the skeletal dragons as they charged towards Nie Yan.

Simultaneously facing off against two Level 10 Leader-class monsters in a such a confined space would undoubtedly mean his untimely death.

The two large skeletal frames came barreling towards him from the sky. They possessed strong bones that were stronger than metal, a powerful body that was full of strength, and a giant tail covered in bony spikes. No matter what he did, it would be impossible to defeat them.

It was hopeless to try and fight them directly; thus, he quickly

scanned his eyes over his skill bar. He could only entrust his life into this final hope—Undead Rite!

This skill was the only thing that could save his life since it had a twenty percent chance of controlling a targeted undead. Whether he lived or died all depended on this skill succeeding!

Due to the level disparity between him and the Undead Dragon, he wasn't sure he'd succeed in controlling it.

In the same instant the skeletal dragons neared, Nie Yan activated the skill and targeted one of them.

Undead Rite!

「System: You've targeted Undead Dragon Gladiator with Undead Rite. Your health has been reduced by 30%.」

「System: Undead Rite has failed!」

As soon as he read the system notification, Nie Yan activated Swift Retreat and rolled out of the way.

A giant tail whipped towards where he had just been standing. 「Boom!」Clouds of dust rose into the air, and large cracks were left on the ground where the tail had struck.

Since the two dragons had charged at him at the same time, one

of them ended up ramming against the other, and they were both sent staggering several steps back due to the impact.

Taking advantage of this brief window, Nie Yan activated Undead Rite once again, though the attempt was shortly followed by an announcement of the spell's failure. Thus, before the dragons recovered from the collision, he rolled past their legs. Managing to stabilize himself with some difficulty, he then fled to the nearest corner.

Not only did the Undead Dragons miss with their attacks, they lost track of their target as well. Ghastly green flames flickered in their eye sockets as they searched for Nie Yan's whereabouts, eventually finding him hidden in the corner.

Shortly after discovering Nie Yan, one of the skeletal dragons lifted its leg and attempted to crush him.

Nie Yan hastily ducked out of the way.

「Boom!」The stomp left a deep imprint in the floor.

Following the first one's attack, the other skeletal dragon attempted to stomp him as well.

He was frightened half to death as he continuously evaded their attacks. Fortunately for him, the narrow passages of this dungeon further limited the movements of the already clumsy undead, and since their attacks were relatively slow, he was able to barely hang

onto his life. However, if this battle continued to drag on at its current pace, he would probably end up dead regardless.

Undead Rite!

「System: You've targeted Undead Dragon Gladiator with Undead Rite. Your health has been reduced by 30%.」

「System: Undead Rite has failed!」

Now that Undead Rite had failed three times in a row, Nie Yan only had a tenth of his health remaining. While evading the attacks, he pulled out a Basic Recovery Potion, downed its contents, and then applied a Combat Bandage to himself.

After evading the skeletal dragons' attacks for several breaths of time, Nie Yan cast Undead Rite once again when his health bar recovered to fifty-two percent.

In the same moment, the two skeletal dragons attacked!

「System: Undead Rite has succeeded!」

Shortly after the system announcement appeared, Nie Yan felt a strange energy being birthed in his mind. The energy rose above his head and shot straight at one of the skeletal dragons, disappearing into its body.

With Undead Rite succeeding, Nie Yan rolled out of the way and evaded the oncoming dragons.

「Boom!」The dragons missed their target and rammed into each other, the impact stunning both and sending them staggering several steps back.

In the meantime, Nie Yan hid in a corner and attentively gazed at the dragon he had taken control of using Undead Rite.

Did I actually succeed? What's the result?

Nie Yan didn't have high expectations in successfully controlling the Undead Dragon due to the level disparity between them. Thus, despite the announcement, he didn't dare to confirm whether he had truly succeeded. This was possibly his last chance at survival; if he missed this opportunity, there would be no more.

Two skeletal dragons and Nie Yan formed a triangle as they stood in this narrow underground dungeon.

However, at this moment, the two dragon were staring at each other.

Time seemed to flow in reverse. returning Sulgata to its prime, when beasts and gladiators fought in the barbarous colosseum. Blood splattered everywhere, painting a vibrant scenery of crimson red.

The dragon who had been targeted by Undead Rite stood there blankly, staring out into space. The ghastly flames in its eyes seemed to be affected by some sort of foreign energy.「Boom! Boom!」It slightly shook about as if trying to break free of the fetters binding it.

“Please, God... Please let it succeed!” Nie Yan prayed for the skill to succeed. In reality, he was an atheist and didn’t actually believe in God or any divine deities. However, there was a certain entity in Conviction—God of Light—that could be considered God, and at this point in time, he became a devout and pious follower.

The other dragon suddenly took action and leapt at Nie Yan.

It pressed toward him and aimed to end his life.

Just as the skeletal dragon leaped into the air, the other dragon, who had been targeted by Undead Rite prior, rammed into its side.「Boom!」The two dragons collided again, and the one that was attacking Nie Yan was sent flying.

Perhaps some divine existence took pity on Nie Yan and answered his prayers because Undead Rite had unexpectedly succeeded in controlling the dragon just in the nick of time!

Under the effects of Undead Rite, a glowing black aura emerged over the dark reddish hues of the skeletal dragon’s bones, transforming it into a huge metallic beast that brimmed with berserk power.

「System: Please name the undead under your command.」

Nie Yan thought of a moment and decided to name this dragon, Dark Gladiator. It seemed appropriate, considering its appearance.

After being successfully controlled by Undead Rite, Dark Gladiator's stats rose by ten percent. The already formidable skeletal dragon had become even more of a matchless powerhouse. Its only weak point was it could only act as a temporary companion and only lasted for three hours, whereupon its soul would be consumed by Undead Rite.

It was hard to imagine that someone could possess control over such a terrifying monster.

Chapter 81 – Dark Gladiator

Dark Gladiator relentlessly attacked the other skeletal dragon and flung it across the underground dungeon, smashing heavily into the walls.

「Boom! Boom! Boom!」The sound of thunderous strikes reverberated through the air as the skeletal dragon was battered left and right across the dungeon. Amidst the relentless assault, the skeletal dragon found an opening and retaliated, whipping its tail at Dark Gladiator's chest!「Boom!」The force of the attack forced Dark Gladiator several steps back. However, Dark Gladiator seemed virtually unaffected as it resumed its assault and rushed at the skeletal dragon again.

As the fighting intensified, Dark Gladiator and the Undead Dragon resembled two ancient behemoths in a life-and-death struggle.

While the two dragons fought, Nie Yan retrieved his Crossbow of Blood from his inventory and adeptly loaded it with the Blackgold Bolts that dealt on-hit true damage. Propping the crossbow to his chest, he aligned the sights on his target and fired.「Whoosh! Whoosh! Whoosh!」The bolts struck the skeletal dragon causing three damage values to rise above its head. Although the damage wasn't ludicrously high, it was still significant. At the minimum, the bolts dealt thirty to forty points in combined damage. In one instance, an armor-break occurred, and Nie Yan was able to deal upwards of a hundred damage.

The two dragons were engaged in an all-out brawl, and despite

the hectic battle, Nie Yan was still able to fire at the other skeletal dragon with pinpoint accuracy.

Nie Yan felt it was quite unfortunate that it took him four attempts to control one of the skeletal dragons using Undead Rite. Moreover, in order to cast it the fourth time, he had been forced to use all of his recovery items to replenish his depleted health as quickly as possible.

He glanced at his remaining health—not even sufficient to cast another Undead Rite. Although he felt uncomfortable with his health being so low, he could do nothing about it since his Combat Bandages and other health recovery items were still on cooldown.

Dark Gladiator's relentless attacks and Nie Yan's continuous fire eventually brought the skeletal dragon down to critical health.

He originally planned to turn this remaining skeletal dragon into his servant as well, but looking at the current situation, such an idea was no longer possible since Dark Gladiator didn't have much health remaining either. If he allowed the battle to drag on and purposefully delayed dealing the killing blow, Dark Gladiator would certainly end up being killed by the other skeletal dragon. After spending so much health obtaining one skeletal dragon, he wasn't willing to let it die without serving him to its full potential.

At the twenty-second mark since the battle began, Dark Gladiator lashed out with its claws and struck the other skeletal dragon in the chest, simultaneously alleviating the opponent of its remaining health. Following the other skeleton dragon's death, a ghastly ball of flame emerged from its chest and floated upward before

gradually disappearing in the air. The skeleton, now a shell without an owner, shattered as it loudly crashed to the floor.

「Jingle! Jingle!」As soon as the dragon collapsed, a melodious tune rang out as a bright radiance emerged from Nie Yan's body. He had finally levelled up to Level 6.

He gained a sizable amount of experience for killing the Level 10 Undead Dragon Gladiator. Due to it being five levels above him, he received seventeen-fold of its base experience value.

Nie Yan walked toward the bone pile and collected the items that dropped from the Undead Dragon. The first item was a pair of Level 10 Gladiator Gloves for Fighters. The other item was surprisingly a Gold-grade chest plate: 57–62 defense, Strength +13, and Resilience +17. It was definitely a good piece of equipment. He reckoned he could sell it for quite a bit in the auction house

Let alone one that gave bonuses in Strength and Resilience, even if a Gold-grade chest plate had undesirable properties, based on the raw defense it provided alone, it would still sell for a decent price. The value of this armour was only slightly lower than the Lion King's Shield he planned to sell to Bladelight.

No buyer should even think of taking the chest plate off his hands if they didn't offer at least twenty silvers. Naturally, this didn't apply for acquaintances or friends who wanted to purchase it. In that case, it would depend on how friendly he was with the person.

After killing the Undead Dragon Gladiator and reaching Level 6, his experience bar filled by thirteen percent. When he checked the player ladder, the current top rank player was a Level 8. Moreover, they were a Mage. In Conviction, no matter how fast a Thief could kill monsters, they would still never compare to a Mage. Some powerful Mages were even able to easily kill monsters above their levels by kiting, taking advantage of terrain, or casting high-level spells. Skilled Mages could even solo-kill certain bosses without taking damage, an incredibly difficult task for melee professions. Of course, these norms didn't apply to an extreme outlier such as him.

Nie Yan glanced at Dark Gladiator who lumbered over to his side. Its enormous body was covered with scratches and deep cut marks. However, they were healing at a pace even visible to the naked eye, and it wasn't a simple recovery either. Rather than restoring to their original state, razor-sharp talons resembling blades began forming on the skeletal dragon's claws, and its appearance became much more terrifying. The ghastly, pale cyan flames in its eye sockets flickered, radiating a deathly cold energy that made others not dare to stare at it straight-on.

Despite its imposing appearance, Dark Gladiator lowered its enormous skull as it kneeled in front of him.

As a controlled monster, it was now completely subservient to him, answering his every beck and call!

Hence, he was free to command it as he pleased.

Nie Yan tilted his head upward and peered at the opening of the

pitfall. I should be able to escape from here now.

He stepped onto the palm of Dark Gladiator's bony claws and ordered it to raise him higher. As he was elevated to a suitable height, he leaped out of its claws and returned to the surface. Dark Gladiator followed soon after and leaped out of the pitfall as well, the weight of its skeletal frame shaking the ground upon landing.

With this super meat-shield at his side, he would no longer have to fear those common skeletons.

Nie Yan would be under Dark Gladiator's protection for roughly three hours, so he would definitely make use of the time by retrieving Sulgata's Shadow.

Having escaped the underground dungeon, Nie Yan strode forward and headed for Sulgata's center. Following behind was the enormous Dark Gladiator who dwarfed him and the surrounding ruins in size.

As soon as Nie Yan arrived in a new area, waves of skeletons would surge towards his position; however, like autumn leaves, they would be smashed apart by Dark Gladiator's sweeping tail. In such a way, his experience bar steadily rose while he advanced toward his destination.

Every so often, after letting Dark Gladiator clean up most of the skeletons, he would find a suitable time to cast Undead Rite on the remaining Skeleton Mages. Hence, in this fashion, he soon formed a party of six consisting of Dark Gladiator, four Skeleton Mages,

and him. Two of the Skeleton Mages specialized in ice magic, one in fire, and the other in lightning. All four guarded his side.

As he travelled through the intricate paths of the outer district, he thought back to the fragmented memories of the time he spent levelling here and seeking out the entrance to the inner district.

Levelling here is pretty fast. Nie Yan glanced at his experience bar. In the span of a few dozen minutes, it had already risen by eight percent. In the wake of his monstrous clearing speed, the surrounding undead in the vicinity couldn't respawn fast enough

Just as he finished clearing the mobs in an area, he heard sounds of activity at his back. Nie Yan furrowed his brows since it didn't resemble the sounds made by the undead. Voices? There are players here?

...

"Levelling here is pretty good but there's just too many skeletons. We almost lost our lives there. How about we go back and call another Priest over? Two isn't enough. We'll need three if we want to continue training here."

"Having too many Priests is inconvenient. How about we call a Holy Mage? They deal two times damage to undead, so our mobbing speed will increase."

"You're right. Let's go back and recruit a Holy Mage."

“There’s a Leader-class Skeleton Mage near the end of this path. We’ll need to circle around it first?”

The voices of several players coming from behind startled Nie Yan. Just as he spun around, he happened to see eight players facing him in the distance after they turned the corner at the end of the path.

In the same instant, the voices of the chattering players immediately came to a halt.

“Huh? Why did you guys stop talking? Did you all go stupid?” an Arcane Mage among them asked in a puzzled tone. He then followed his companions’ gazes, he immediately lost his voice as well.

There, at the end of the path, stood a player dressed in a Thief’s attire. They could tell with a single glance that his gear, especially the pair of daggers in his hands, was completely out of the ordinary. Why did this Thief suddenly appear out of nowhere? What was even more shocking, however, was the enormous bone dragon standing at this player’s side. As they stared at its dark metallic red bones, towering body, immense spiked tail, and razor sharp claws, they could instantly tell it was a tier higher than the common undead walking around this area.

Besides the skeletal dragon, four Skeleton Mages guard the Thief as they loosely gathered by his side, guarding him. The flickering flames in their eye sockets stared back at the recently emerged

group of player.

The existence of the enormous bone dragon alone made this Thief seem all the more mysterious.

Chapter 82 – Skeleton Executioners

“Thief?”

“Is that... an NPC?” A Mage stammered in question.

“No, it’s a player!” Cold shivers traveled down another Thief’s body as fear grew in his heart.

“He summoned these skeletons? Is he a Necromancer?”

“No, he appears to be a Thief!”

Nie Yan stood silently with the Dark Gladiator, just looking at them, but also giving them a formless feeling of oppression. This was because he was manipulating the strings of their fates at this moment. If he commanded that enormous skeletal dragon to charge over and added the attacks from the four skeletal mages as well, those assembled would have no hope of survival at all.

The gloomy, cyan flames in the Dark Gladiator’s eyes flared. It was waiting for Nie Yan’s command. It would immediately make a move if he gave the word to attack.

Nie Yan used Transcendent Insight to view the information of these players.

Leader Young Seven, Forgotten, Yi Yan... all sorts of familiar

names floated into view. Level six, six, and five. These people were influential personages in their past lives. Although they hadn't joined any other guilds, they'd formed a team called True Dragon Mark. The strength of this team was roughly on par with the elite teams of the guilds.

It was then that Nie Yan recalled that he'd met these players when he was tracking the Serpentine Lizard.

This made sense when he thought about it. Players who dared come to Sulgata Ancient City at this level naturally wouldn't be bumbling fools.

Leader Young Seven was a player who would be known as one of the Seven Great Priests in the future. A strong Priest was of utmost importance to a team. They would even have the effect of saving the entire team at critical moments.

As for Forgotten, he'd been superior to Nie Yan in his past life and was also one of the Thieves who received the moniker of Shadow Dancer. While he had been on roughly the same level as Nie Yan in terms of techniques, he had entered the game earlier and had an elite team. His level and equipment were both superior to Nie Yan. However, circumstances were different now. Nie Yan had more than ten years of experience as a Thief over Forgotten, and in this timeline, they both entered the game at the same time. So their positions would be sure to be rewritten in this life.

Perhaps one day, they would be the ones to learn to look up to Nie Yan.

As for the others, they weren't as renowned as leader Young Seven or Forgotten, but they had a small bit of fame as well. Yi Yan for instance, was not a bad Fighter. Although he wasn't ranked in the top ten of the Fighter rankings, he was at least in the top 50. This was still quite a high ranking. After all, the entire Righteous faction would have hundreds of thousands of teams ten years from now.

Although Nie Yan had heard of these people before, he'd never come in contact with them.

They stared at each other for a while, with the hand that leader Young Seven was using to grip his staff breaking out in a cold sweat. He didn't display his internal nervousness on his face however. If Nie Yan made a move, the six of them would most likely not make it out alive. They'd naturally be gifting Nie Yan several pieces of equipment.

If Nie Yan made a move, it would be a single sided slaughter.

However, Nie Yan had his own thoughts about this matter. These people weren't weak, and although their current levels were low, they would be sure to be elite experts in the future. If Nie Yan gave the order for the Dark Gladiator to charge and kill them, he'd at most get his hands on a few pieces of equipment and a red name. Those pieces of equipment weren't worth much money at all, and he wasn't short on money. Why make so many enemies? They didn't know what he had come to Sulgata for, and he didn't need to worry about someone seizing Sulgata's Shadow at this current level.

Nie Yan smiled faintly and paid no more attention to these players, heading towards the depths of the city.

The Dark Gladiator looked at Nie Yan's back, swiveled its head to look at the players, and then turned to follow him.

Several skeletons came pouncing towards Nie Yan. The Dark Gladiator lifted its tail high and sent it crashing down heavily, smashing the skeletons into fragments.

No one dared to follow. Whoever followed Nie Yan was courting death.

Nie Yan walked away quite dashing. They'd only had one glance at his face, but it was something that Young Seven and the others would never forget.

"Wait!" Forgotten called out towards Nie Yan.

Nie Yan didn't turn back as he left straight ahead, vanishing at the end of the path.

Countless numbers of skeletons poured in, blocking their line of vision and making it so that even the tall Dark Gladiator disappeared from sight as well.

"Just who was that fellow? He was damn awesome, and he really

had summoned those skeletons!” Yi Yan mumbled off on the side. This was too frightening if this was the case.

“Perhaps they weren’t summoned creatures. Didn’t we get a Spirit Summoning Scroll drop too? He might’ve gotten something else.” Young Seven spoke, deep in thought. “Even if this is the case, he’s got some skills to dare come to Sulgata alone.”

“Oh right, Forgotten, what did you call out to him for just now?” Yi Yan asked, perplexed.

“Since he turned to leave, that proved that he wouldn’t do anything to us. It’s a good idea to interact more with someone like that.”

“Other people may not be willing to join our team.” Young Seven said. Otherwise, Nie Yan wouldn’t have turned without another word. It was obvious that he didn’t want to have anything to do with them.

“That’s fine too. We’ll become familiar with each other after some chatting. I used Inspect just now, that guy’s called Nie Yan.” Forgotten didn’t know what he was feeling now either. As a fellow Thief, there seemed to be a great gap between him and Nie Yan.

“Nie Yan? I seemed to have heard this name before. One of my friends said once that someone called Nie Yan slaughtered a lot of people in Radiant Sacred Flame. It looks like he’s the one. I’ve heard that he also has a relationship with Sleepy Fox.” Leader Young Seven said. He had friends in all sorts of places, and his

sources of news were more timely. He often gossiped when chatting about news, like which guild had gotten a face full of dust from someone, which guilds had fought each other, etc.

“Is he someone from Holy Empire?”

“No idea, I didn’t see him wear a guild emblem just now. I don’t think so.”

Nie Yan had left them with a deep impression with just one glance. A lone Thief had dared to charge into Sulgata—this was why they felt deep respect for him. If they stumbled upon a chance to create good relations with Nie Yan or recruit him into their team, they would definitely jump on it.

Nie Yan moved towards the center of the city following along the passages within the maze-like outer district. He didn’t know about the intentions and plans of those behind him. If he knew that they wanted to recruit him for their team, he would’ve told them to give up. Nie Yan wouldn’t listen to anyone else’s commands. He’d joined the elites of Holy Empire only to get his hands on some equipment. He did want to form a team, but the reigns of command had to be in his hands.

The Dark Gladiator rushed forward fiercely, slamming groups of monsters to death. Under this freakish speed of mob killing, Nie Yan’s experience bar filled up rapidly.

He made his way through a patch of maze and entered an open square. It measured several thousand meters in radius and the tall,

rugged pyramid structure was in the center.

Scores of tall and stocky Skeleton Executioners were patrolling around the center of the square. They were at least five meters tall, and were moving skeletons. Their right arms were noticeably thicker as they carried heavy axes. The axes were spotted with rust, but were still quite ferocious.

Chapter 83 – Expressing Goodwill

Skeleton Executioner: Level 13

Health: 1200/1200

These Skeleton Executioners had even more health than Dark Gladiator, not to mention they were quite numerous as well.

However, the caveat was once they were killed, they would never respawn again. Although he had visited Sulgata in the original timeline, these Skeleton Executioners had long been exterminated. Presumably, they were placed there for the sole purpose of guarding and preventing intruders from stealing the piece of Sulgata's Shadow. Even though he knew a group of players had retrieved the piece from this city in the past, he wasn't aware of the price they had to pay to do so.

He could imagine the bitter struggles those players must have gone through as he observed the Skeleton Executioners roaming this area.

"I didn't expect there to be so many Sub-Elites..." Nie Yan muttered under his breath as his brows furrowed. However, thinking it over, it made sense that a Legendary-grade item such as Sulgata's Shadow would have the protection of many strong monsters, even if just a single piece.

He calmly observed the area's topography to determine if it was possible to make a detour. Unfortunately, the area was too open, meaning he would be spotted as soon as he showed himself. As for

any cover he could make use of, he spotted a lone pillar standing in the distance—something far from being adequate.

Another possible method was to have Dark Gladiator lead the Dark Executioners away, giving him an opportunity to sneak in; however, he felt uneasy facing the hidden dangers that might lurk within the pyramid with no help accompanying him. Sacrificing Dark Gladiator simply wasn't worth the risk.

He retreated for now and pondered over the matter while farming the weaker undead mobs in the vicinity.

Is it possible to turn the Skeleton Executioners into servants?

Nie Yan ordered Dark Gladiator to retreat inside the outer district and remain on standby. He jumped onto the outer district's border walls and retrieved the Crossbow of Blood from his inventory, then aligned the sight on the Skeleton Executioners.

"Fifty-two meters, too far... Fifty meters, still too far..." Just as he was about to leave to find a more suitable position, a lone Skeleton Executioner started moving towards him, drawing progressively close.

Perfect! Nie Yan pulled the trigger.「Whoosh! Whoosh! Whoosh!」 Three bolts pierced the air and successively struck their target.

The cyan flames in the Skeleton Executioner's eye sockets flickered as it tilted its head and locked its gaze onto the aggressor

positioned atop the wall. It immediately brandished its gigantic axe and charged at Nie Yan.

The Skeleton Executioner emitted an odd roar that resembled the grinding of a bulldozer, swinging its axe wildly as it lumbered over.

The commotion also caused the nearby thirty-plus Skeleton Executioners to come forward.

Seeing the Skeleton Executioner about to smash the wall with its gigantic axe, Nie Yan jumped off the wall and withdrew at the last possible moment.

「Boom!」The large axe struck the eroded wall, breaking it as if it were rotten wood and bringing down large chunks of stone.「Boom! Boom! Boom!」Several dozen thunderous strikes followed the first, and the walls rapidly collapsed, allowing the Skeleton Executioners to enter the outer district.

Nie Yan ran backwards, his eyes remaining fixed on the crumbling wall as he avoided the flying debris. He found a suitable opening and cast Undead Rite, which took away thirty percent of his health in an instant.

A wisp of light struck a Skeleton Executioner and entered its body.

Its movements momentarily froze; however, in the next moment, the Skeleton Executioner broke free of the spell's bindings and

charged towards Nie Yan with its axe raised.

“Dammit, it failed...” He promptly rolled out of the way, dodging the oncoming axe. He then dashed toward a nearby wall, scaled over it, and hopped off on the other side. In this fashion, he traversed through the labyrinth-like outer district with the Skeleton Executioners in tow.

After destroying several walls without finding Nie Yan, the Skeleton Executioners finally gave up and returned to the pyramid.

There were just too many of them, which made it quite difficult to find a suitable opportunity to cast Undead Rite. Not to mention the low success rate, even if he succeeded by some lucky fluke, his new servant would be hacked to pieces by the other Skeleton Executioners almost immediately. Although there’d be one less to deal with, he could only imagine how tedious and inefficient it would be to use this method to enter the pyramid. At the very minimum, it would take him two to three days to clear the area of Skeleton Executioners.

Retrieving that piece of Sulgata’s Shadow is going to be more problematic than I initially thought...

In the end, Nie Yan had no choice but to helplessly linger around the outer district, allowing Dark Gladiator to clean up the surrounding mobs. Fortunately, the levelling speed was quite fast, which could count as a small consolation.

Before three hours were fully up, Nie Yan had cast Undead Rite

three more times but made zero headway in recruiting a Skeleton Executioner. In a mere half hour or so, Dark Gladiator would disappear.

Don't tell me... I have to just forget about it and try again later? However, if he decided to give up today, he might not be as lucky next time in finding an amazing servant like Dark Gladiator again. In addition, there was no guarantee another player wouldn't snatch the piece of Sulgata's Shadow before he returned.

Just as he was racking his brain over this problem, he heard the voices of nearby players enter his ear.

"It's these guys again..." Nie Yan wrinkled his brows. Since the last time he met them, those players had finally explored their way here. With the presence of outsiders, he wouldn't be able to execute his plans without a hitch. Before he retrieved the piece of Sulgata's Shadow, he didn't want to allow any others to become aware of its existence. However, he realized that even if they arrived here, once they saw how many Skeleton Executioners there were in the vicinity, they wouldn't even dare to take half a step forward, let alone have any thoughts of entering the pyramid.

Unless they were all over Level 10 and brought a much larger group of players along with them, it would be impossible to clear the opening of all the Skeleton Executioners. Nie Yan still had ample time to retrieve Sulgata's Shadow.

In the same moment, six players entered Nie Yan's view.

The players were greeted by the sight of an enormous skeleton dragon standing by Nie Yan's side like a dutiful guardian; the ghostly flames in its eye sockets seemed to follow their every move. Meanwhile, beside the Thief also stood three Skeleton Mages with their staffs brandished, ready to attack at any time, not letting their guards down in the slightest.

While within the safety of a city or a town, players maintained amiable attitudes and often befriended others. As soon as they stepped into the wilderness, however, their demeanors would completely reverse. Any stranger could become a potential enemy since everyone feared being plotted against or being ambushed by other players. Often times, even simple misunderstandings could lead to an endless bloodbath.

So even though Nie Yan had Dark Gladiator at his side, if those six players simultaneously attacked him, he'd still end up dying in a short amount of time. Thus, he had no choice but to keep his guard up against them at all times.

Leader Young Seven, Forgotten, and the others also noticed Nie Yan's presence at the same time and halted.

"Greetings, we mean no harm!" Forgotten was the first one to speak up. Their group of six were also extremely cautious. After all, their life and death lay in how Nie Yan viewed them.

"Whether your intentions are bad or not makes no difference to me," Nie Yan indifferently replied, taking the initiative to establish which side held dominance.

Young Seven and the others glanced at Dark Gladiator that stood by Nie Yan's side. In truth, his statement was absolutely correct. With such a terrifying servant under his command, it really didn't matter if they had come to provoke him or not.

"We came here simply because we wanted to befriend you. Besides, I believe there haven't been any cases where we've offended you in the past," Young Seven answered as he calmly took a step forward and gazed at Nie Yan.

Although they appeared to be at a complete disadvantage, Young Seven's bearing was neither servile nor overbearing.

Pretty courageous... He was certainly worthy of being called one of the most outstanding players in his original timeline. Seemingly disregarding life and death, he staked his life in order to move one step closer toward Nie Yan.

Nie Yan had a change of heart. Since he hadn't found a way of entering the pyramid on his own, Young Seven and his team might be able to help.

Chapter 84 – Aggroing Monsters

As Young Seven observed Nie Yan's taciturn appearance, a certain thought drifted through his mind. Why did he enter Sulgata all by himself? There must've been a reason... Maybe a quest of some sort?

"I assume you came here for a reason. Do you need any help?" Young Seven took the initiative to ask.

"Even with these undead servants, I'm still not confident I'll be able to succeed. Are you certain you want to help?" Nie Yan stared at Young Seven and the others as he narrowed his eyes.

Upon hearing Nie Yan's rather straightforward response, Young Seven and his squadmates felt their minds turn to mush. If he couldn't accomplish his task even with that giant bone dragon by his side, then of what use would they be?

"Encountering each other here could be considered fate. At the very least, we're not enemies, so if we can provide any assistance, we'll do our best to provide it. Even if we can't, we'll have at least made another friend, right?" Young Seven replied in an affable manner.

Nie Yan slightly relaxed his mind. In his previous life, he never interacted with Young Seven, Forgotten, or anyone else in their group, so he wasn't sure of their personalities. Right now, however, they seemed to be pretty easy to get along with. Perhaps they really could become friends.

He went on to ponder in silence. The Skeletal Executioners always seemed to move together. If Young Seven and his team could draw them away, then perhaps he'd have a shot at entering the pyramid. There would certainly be monsters guarding the interior, but he could just let Dark Gladiator and the Skeleton mages deal with them. If things went smoothly, he might actually reach the room where the piece of Sulgata's Shadow was located.

While Nie Yan continued to ponder deeply, Young Seven, Forgotten, and the rest of the team shot meaningful glances at each other. Although they didn't know exactly what he was thinking about, he was still a dangerous figure that could annihilate their entire team. If Nie Yan still declined their offer to help, they would have no other choice but to stay as far away as possible.

"If we can't help, then let's just leave," suggested Forgotten.

Young Seven suddenly came to realization upon hearing Forgotten's suggestion. Since Nie Yan definitely came here with a purpose, perhaps for a secret quest of some sort, their presence here might actually be a hindrance to him! If that was the case, wouldn't they be worsening their relationship with him instead by attempting to help?

Even now, Nie Yan still hadn't given a reply.

It's best if we just take our leave then, Young Seven concluded. He turned to Forgotten and replied, "Since we won't be able to help, let's forget it. It's about time we return to town anyway." His

voice just happened to be within earshot of Nie Yan. Their conversation dispelled any misgivings he might've previously held and informed him they were willing to leave.

“It's not that you won't be able to help. But first, how about we make a little deal?” Nie Yan suddenly interrupted.

“What kind of deal?” Young Seven asked.

“I need you to help me with a certain task. It's quite dangerous, but if you succeed, I'll give you a Gold-grade piece of equipment.” Nie Yan still had the shoulder guards in his bag. Although it was a Gold-grade item with decent properties, it was negligible when compared to Sulgata's Shadow.

If Young Seven and the others were truly willing to help him, he wouldn't be miserly when it came to rewards.

In the game's current stage, Gold-grade equipment was fairly rare.

Young Seven, Forgotten, and the rest of the team privately conversed amongst themselves. To illustrate just how rare Gold-grade equipment was, their team had only managed to acquire two Gold-grade pieces of equipment since the game started. Not to mention, they had to go through hell and back each time just to retrieve them. Yet Nie Yan, a player unassociated with any guilds, was actually willing to give one out so easily. This meant his skill was clearly on another level. Young Seven made a firm resolve in his mind. They definitely had to befriend him!

“Brother, since you’ve asked this of us, we can only try our best. As for compensating us, you don’t have to bother,” Young Seven replied in a bright tone. A measly Gold-grade item was nothing as long as they could establish a good relationship with Nie Yan. If they helped him without accepting a reward, then he would owe them a favour.

“Accepting help without giving anything in return? That won’t do. So long as you help me here, I promise to pay back the favour in the future.”

“Sounds good. So, what do you need us to do?” Young Seven asked.

“Well, how about we introduce ourselves first. My name is Nie Yan (Nirvana Flame).”

“I’m Leader Young Seven, but you can just call me Young Seven.”

“As for me, I’m Forgotten.”

And thus, the rest of Young Seven’s team introduced themselves. Although their skills couldn’t be compared to Nie Yan’s, they were still all talented individuals who weren’t half-bad.

“We don’t have much time, so just follow me for now.” Nie Yan said as he headed deeper into the outer district.

Young Seven and the rest followed close behind.

The numerous Skeleton Executioners had wreaked havoc upon the outer district. The already eroded buildings had become even more ruined, and many of the walls were collapsed.

After Nie Yan and the others arrived at the limits of the outer district, they hid behind a collapsed wall and gazed over at the plaza which led to the pyramid. There they saw over thirty Skeleton Executioners roaming freely, each one a Level 13 Sub-Elite monster

He can't possibly be thinking of having us fight these monsters, right...!? Young Seven and his team couldn't help but have this thought as they felt their scalps turning numb. However, they didn't voice out their concerns. They didn't want to look weak in front of Nie Yan. Killing a single Skeleton Executioner wouldn't be a problem for their team, but taking on a group this large was surely impossible.

“Let me explain the plan. There are thirty-three Skeleton Executioners total. They all move in one group, so if you attack one of them, the others will follow. What I want you guys to do is to lure them away,” Nie Yan explained. If Young Seven and his team could lead these Skeleton Executioners away, then he would be able to pass through the plaza and safely enter the pyramid.

“You only want us to lead them away, right?” Young Seven asked, mentally sighing a breath of relief. Thankfully that was all he was asking of them. Although the task was still dangerous, it was nothing compared to actually fighting them.

“Yeah, I only need you to draw them away. It doesn’t have to be for long either. Around thirty seconds will be enough,” Nie Yan replied. Half a minute was more than sufficient for him to pass through the plaza and reach the pyramid.

“Alright, that makes things a bit easier.”

“I want you guys aggro them from here. Let me move to another location first. When I’m ready, I’ll give you guys the signal. Dissolve your party and accept my invite,” Nie Yan instructed. With other players helping him, entering the pyramid was going to be much easier.

“Alright.”

Once Young Seven disbanded his party, Nie Yan promptly invited everyone into his own.

“Perfect, I’ll be leaving it up to you then,” Nie Yan said, his tone sounding much less colder than before.

“Rest assured,” Young Seven nodded his head and replied. Nie Yan was quite polite. It seemed this was going to be the start of a beautiful friendship.

Nie Yan brought Dark Gladiator and the Skeleton Mages with him to another position.

His figure gradually became smaller in the distance.

“I just took a look. That bone dragon by Nie Yan’s side is a genuine Sub-Elite monster!” Forgotten exclaimed in shock. “What a godly player. Even a Sub-Elite undead isn’t out of his reach. I wonder how long it lasts. Maybe it’s permanent!”

“It shouldn’t be permanent. I was able to see more information when I used Inspect. That thing only has twenty minutes left before it disappears,” Young Seven replied. Still... even if that was the case, Nie Yan was still pretty incredible.

“No wonder he seemed to be in a rush. Hey, what do you think he wants to enter the pyramid for?”

“I think it’s probably a hidden quest.”

“Coming here to do a quest at this level, does he not care about dying?”

“Who knows?”

“He’s in position. I’ll go out and draw aggro,” Forgotten said after glancing at the team chat.

“You be careful now, we’re dealing with thirty-plus Sub-Elites after all,” Young Seven warned Forgotten.

“Understood. Heh, I can handle myself. You don’t need to worry.” Forgotten sheathed his dagger and took out a small crossbow, then walked closer to the square.

Young Seven and his team were positioned to the northeast of the square, while Nie Yan was positioned to the northwest. Coincidentally, Nie Yan was able to see their situation from his position, so after he sent a message through the team chat, he saw Forgotten stepping out from behind a rock pile and slowly approach the Skeleton Executioners while crouching, crossbow in hand.

By the time Forgotten found an adequate position, the closest Skeleton Executioner was already within the range of his crossbow. He aimed at the Skeleton Executioner and fired. 「Whoosh!」 A single bolt pierced through the air.

Chapter 85 – Secret Compartment

The crossbow bolt arced through the air and struck the nearest Skeleton Executioner directly in the chest. After being suddenly attacked, it let out a furious roar and charged toward Forgotten.

The roar also alerted the surrounding Skeleton Executioners, who stampeded toward Forgotten in a large mob.

“Crap, they’re all coming over!”

Seeing this, Forgotten immediately turned tail and leaped over the pile of rocks, fleeing for his life. After all, who would dare stay still when faced with such a terrifying sight.

Yet this was only the beginning. They had been tasked with keeping these Skeleton Executioners distracted for at least half a minute, which meant their job was far from over.

Nie Yan watched from the sidelines as the Skeleton Executioners stampeded toward the northeast. As their silhouettes grew distant, the plaza was soon emptied of their presence; thus, Nie Yan brought Dark Gladiator and the rest of his undead toward the pyramid’s entrance.

「Boom! Boom! Boom!」Thunderous noises reverberated from northeast of the plaza as the mob of Skeleton Executioners wreaked havoc upon the remaining ruins, causing the walls to topple over and collapse. In addition, volleys of magic could periodically be seen flying through the air, raining down upon the

mob.

The spells were coming from Young Seven and the others, who, for the sake of stalling for time, didn't hesitate to attack the group despite being well aware of the risks.

It appeared these players were quite earnest in helping him out. If they truly did end up helping him retrieve the fragment of Sulgata's Shadow, then not only would he honour the favour he owed them, he would also gift them the Gold-grade shoulder guards regardless of their prior refusal. Even in games, if a person gave their word, then they should keep it. It was by far the simplest way to get along with others. And getting along with others was essential to establishing a large network of contacts. When one encountered a situation and required assistance, it became more convenient to find help.

「System: Player Round Stool has died.」

As he glanced at the party window, Nie Yan saw the highlighted text of a player's name turn dark. This meant a member from Young Seven's group had been killed. Aggroing these Skeleton Executioners was a dangerous task; it came as no surprise that one or two players would end up dying.

As the battle in the northeast raged on, Nie Yan became ever more concerned about how much longer they could hold out for. At this point, however, all he could do was hope for the best as he accelerated his pace towards the pyramid.

Bringing the Skeleton Mages along would be much too cumbersome. Thus, before he and Dark Gladiator moved towards the pyramid, he ordered them to farm monsters in the surrounding area and left them to their own devices. He and Dark Gladiator dashed through the plaza and safely arrived at the pyramid's entrance.

The entrance, which appeared to be two solid metal gates carved with ancient, intricate designs, wasn't all that large. Though, through the passing of the ages, their beauty had long since faded, giving way to rust and the dilapidation of time.

「I've already entered the pyramid. Hurry up and leave,」Nie Yan said through the party's voice channel. However, just as those words exited his mouth, another player's name turned dark; a second member of Young Seven's team had been killed. For the sake of aiding him, they had made sacrifices that couldn't be considered negligible. Fortunately, they were able to retrieve the equipment that had dropped from those who died.

「Roger, we'll be taking our leave then,」Young Seven replied. If they stayed any longer, it would be hard to predict what else might happen, so after receiving Nie Yan's go-ahead, the remaining members immediately withdrew from the battle.

「Thanks for this, I'll give you the equipment when I get back.」

「No problem, we'll be in the area farming mobs for a bit before returning to town.」

After entering the pyramid, Nie Yan walked through a dark, long and narrow passageway along a flight of stairs. Relying on his past knowledge, he carefully avoided all the hidden traps along the path.

The hidden mechanisms in this passage were all extremely dangerous and would result in instant death for anyone unlucky enough to trigger them. Nie Yan was quite cautious as he advanced along the path, not daring to reveal the slightest degree of carelessness.

Fortunately, no matter what manner of trap appeared, none of them were new to him since he had encountered every single one in his previous life. Therefore, as long as he wasn't careless, none of these traps would pose any threat to him.

Advancing down the path, an eerie chill that made his blood run cold seemed to come from the depths of the pyramid.

As Nie Yan reached the end of the passageway, he was met with a dead end. All that lay ahead was a large stagnant pool of water.

The way leading to the interior of the pyramid was underneath this pool!

Nie Yan dived into the water and swam towards the depths while Dark Gladiator followed from behind. As an undead, Dark Gladiator didn't need to breathe. Thus, it wouldn't matter how long it stayed submerged underwater.

It was a sealed underwater passage. In every direction, left and right, above and below, were smooth stone walls while the path ahead was dark and foreboding. The path was so dark it was nearly impossible to make anything out.

Nie Yan continued to swim ahead, though he wasn't rushing at all, so if by any chance he encountered a monster while underwater, he'd have ample time to react.

Just at that moment, Nie Yan suddenly felt something peculiar about the stone wall to his left, and his heart leapt out in alarm. There was a hidden mechanism inside the wall!

He only had time to see two sharp, black arrowheads emerge from it.

「Whoosh! Whoosh!」Two arrows shot out, leaving a trail of bubbles behind them while flying directly at Nie Yan.

He did an underwater roll and leaned his head to the side, and almost immediately after, an arrow streaked past his cheek and left side. Just by a hair's breadth, he had nearly been struck in the head and heart. Luckily though, he had a good reaction speed.

The two arrows merely ended up embedded on the opposite wall.

After this close call, he became even more cautious and prudent.

Proceeding further into the depths of the underwater passage, his

eyes happened to glance over at a certain area on the wall to his right where he discovered peculiar scratch marks, other markings, and what appeared to be ancient characters above them.

In the previous timeline, very few players, if any at all, who arrived here would be able to recognize these characters scribbled on the wall. Nie Yan, on the other hand, recognized these marks and characters. They were the secret totemic marking of the Dragons, and as for the two eroded characters above...

They were also the language of the Dragons!

Since Nie Yan had learned the Dragon Tongue from the Annals of Shared Governance he was immediately able to recognize these characters.

Legends told that before city perished, the Lord of Sulgata secretly hid all his treasures somewhere inside the city. Believing these legends to be true, in his previous life, players searched every nook and cranny of the city, yet no one was able to find even a hint of their whereabouts.

The Dragons believed in destruction, exercising their faith in flame and incineration which desired the eradication of everything in existence. It was certain the totemic marking on the wall possessed a unique origin!

Upon feeling a sense of suffocation suddenly come from his chest, he realized that he seemed to be running out of breath, so in response, he activated the underwater breathing ability of the

Water Aversion Pearl and began searching around the wall. However, excluding a few minute cracks, it was as smooth as a mirror, and he couldn't find any peculiarities whatsoever.

Could I just be overthinking things?

He was convinced the Dragon totemic markings appearing in this location wasn't a simple matter.

Paying heed to his conviction, he expanded the range of his search and reached his hands into a nook beneath the wall.

There, his hands happened to pass over five cavities roughly the size of a fingerprint. These five cavities were so faint that they were extremely easy to miss if one passed over them carelessly.

Perhaps, a secret lay in these five cavities.

He placed the fingers on his right hand over the cavities, and as he slowly exerted pressure over them, they began sinking inward.

「Rumble! Rumble!」 A slab of stone an arm's length away from him slowly protruded outward.

There was a secret compartment inside this wall! The activating mechanism to this compartment was extremely well hidden. Unless someone searched for a lengthy period of time, they would have no hopes of discovering it.

Although he didn't know if any players discovered the totemic markings in his previous life, he definitely never heard of anyone finding this hidden compartment.

Chapter 86 – Gem

In the moment the slab fell out and the secret compartment was revealed, a rainbow-coloured radiance blossomed out and illuminated the dark, underwater passage. Nie Yan swam over and looked inside, but was blinded by the intense brilliance. However, as his eyes slowly adapted, he saw a mess of items loosely scattered around the interior. It appeared much of the compartment's contents had already been removed, presumably by NPCs. Nonetheless, quite a few items remained behind, all of which were precious gems of various quality and type.

Nie Yan collected all of the gems and sorted through them. Five were Fortune Gems (1), and the rest were even more precious Resilient Gems (1) and Life Gems (1), which there were two and three of respectively. Although one was the lowest quality rating for a gem, they were still fairly uncommon in the game's current stage. A single Fortune Gem (1) could go for roughly five silvers. As for the two other gems, the Resilient and Life ones, it was a bit difficult to determine their prices since they had yet to appear on the marketplace. However, once a Jewelcrafter socketed these gems into equipment, their corresponding properties would increase significantly.

Equipment didn't generally come with sockets, so players were required to pay a two silver commission fee to a Jewelcrafter to create one. Gold equipment could possess up to two sockets, Dark Gold up to three, and Legendary up to five. Once the sockets were created, for three additional silvers, the player could then have the Jewelcrafter socket a gem, and once they were socketed into a piece of equipment, Resilient Gems (1) would increase Resilience by five and Life Gems (1) would increase health by fifty.

Due to their effects, practically all the major guilds fought over these gems. However, since their production rate was extremely low, they were almost never listed for sale and thus didn't have a set market value. In addition, due to their rarity, it would be a waste to socket them into anything lower than Dark Gold-grade. In some circumstances, though, it was acceptable to socket rare Gold-grade items such as shields, rings, necklaces, and so on.

I've struck it rich this time! Nie Yan inwardly exclaimed. Today's harvests were fairly abundant. So no matter happens next, the trip had at least paid for itself. If he were to list these gems up on the auction house, it would cause hordes of players to scramble and fight over them. Naturally, he had no plans of selling since, with so many gems, he could raise the overall quality of his gear significantly! Even if he did sell any of them, he would do so only if any remained after he had finished using them for himself and only to friends and acquaintances.

Nie Yan felt endless elation when he thought about these gems.

He threw these gems into a [small sack](#) and continued searching the compartment to confirm he hadn't overlooked anything. Only then did he leave the secret compartment and proceeded deeper into the passage, resuming his original objective.

Nie Yan paid closer attention to the surrounding walls, but it led to no further discoveries.

A dozen or so minutes later, as he swam along the narrow

passageway, he saw a sliver of light shining from above. Following it, he swam and eventually reached the water's surface, whereupon he was greeted by the sight of an enormous room that could seemingly fit several hundred people. At the very center was a golden sarcophagus. It was five meters long, two meters wide, and two meters tall, and its surface was covered in delicate carvings, most of which were depictions of various dragons.

Besides the sarcophagus, the room was void of anything else.

It doesn't seem like there are any monsters here. Nie Yan leapt out of the water and onto dry ground, then walked toward the giant sarcophagus. Right behind him, Dark Gladiator burst out of the water and positioned itself in a location not far from him.

Sulgata's Shadow was a legendary Thief item and possessed much history behind it. Reportedly, the Lord of Sulgata, Seres Thoth, wore this piece of equipment during his reign in the Dark Era. However, when the conflict broke out, the item was shattered into three fragments. Now, it merely awaited the day when it would be restored. When all three fragments were retrieved, the powerful magical item would then finally make its reappearance in the world.

Each individual fragment was useless on its own. Thus, he could only wait until he possessed all three fragments for the item to have any effects. More importantly, however, was the fact that Nie Yan knew the location of the two other fragments. The second fragment was located in a Level 30 area, and the third was located in a Level 60 one. Although Level 30 and Level 60 seemed far away, he at least had definite goals for the future.

Legendary-grade equipment were items countless players coveted but were unable to obtain. Since there was an opportunity to obtain one, there was no chance Nie Yan could possibly let it pass by. He'd seize this fragment first and then wait until his level rose appropriately before seeking out the other two. Although it wouldn't provide any immediate benefits, he was laying a path for the future that would pay off in the long-term.

As he drew closer, he discovered lines of characters carved on the stone above the sarcophagus. Like the totemic carvings he saw before, the characters here were also written in Dragon Tongue.

「TOMB OF LORD SERES THOTH」

「WHOEVER DISTURBS HIS REST WILL BE CURSED!」

The item Nie Yan had been searching for was located inside this sarcophagus, so it was, of course, necessary for him to open it!

The fragment of Sulgata's Shadow was within his reach!

However, the very same moment, Dark Gladiator suddenly walked over and stood by Nie Yan's side. The pale cyan flames in its eye sockets flickered even more intensely as it stared at the golden sarcophagus. Although it was a lower life form without intelligence nor a sense of fear, its instincts had driven it to protect him.

In response, Nie Yan glanced at Dark Gladiator's information

window. It seemed it had been inflicted with a status effect when they entered this tomb.

Dark Oppression: All stats are reduced by 20%.

Dark Gladiator's stats had actually been reduced by a full twenty percent.

As Nie Yan began to wonder what sort of terrifying entity lurked inside this sarcophagus, traces of hesitation arose in his heart. If he was unable to retrieve the fragment of Sulgata's Shadow and died instead, it would be a situation where he tried to steal a chicken and ended up losing the rice used to lure it.

Regarding the pyramid, all of the information he possessed came from hearsay, so he wasn't knowledgeable of the finer details, and he was even more clueless when it came to the golden sarcophagus before him.

Will I be able to use a Return Scroll inside this tomb?

Nie Yan took out a Return Scroll and tested it to see. He was able to activate it without a problem! After confirming that he could still use the scroll to escape, the tension he felt abated significantly. In the worst case scenario, he'd grab the item and use the Return Scroll to escape. Besides, no matter how useless Dark Gladiator became, at the very least, it could still act as a meat shield for a brief period of time.

Risk and reward were two sides of the same coin. If he didn't take any risks, how would he be able to reap any rewards?

Nie Yan resolved himself and walked up to the sarcophagus. Feeling around it, he found a small metal button protruding to the side. This was the activating mechanism for opening the sarcophagus! He reluctantly pushed the button and swiftly retreated behind Dark Gladiator. If anything dangerous emerged, he could only rely on Dark Gladiator to shield him.

The interior mechanisms of the sarcophagus slowly turned, emitting a sound that could cause a person to quake in fear. The lid slowly began moving away, and the friction of metal grinding against metal produced a sharp sound resembling nails on a chalkboard.

After the sarcophagus completely opened, a mummified corpse wearing a set of heavy armour appeared before Nie Yan's eyes. It had completely rotted away; all that remained was skin and bones. The corpse wore a golden crown on its head. Its arms were folded flat across its stomach where both palms grasped a golden longsword pointed upwards. It was clear that, at the time of burial, the person died with a solemn and dignified expression.

Crusadium, Blacklight Crystal... Nie Yan scanned his eyes over the materials of the armour as his heart rate progressively increased. These were all priceless items!

Unfortunately, the equipment on this corpse weren't items he could use. They were all incredibly heavy, and in his current state, even if he exerted all of his strength, he would be unable to budge

it by so much as an inch.

At a first glance, when Nie Yan swept over the rest of the coffin and found a wooden case resting by the corpse's side, it seemed exceedingly ordinary. For it to be put in such a luxurious sarcophagus made it seem somewhat out of place. However, his expression brightened immediately upon laying eyes on it. This box was exactly what he came for.

At this point, Nie Yan felt like his heart was going to leap out of his chest.

Sulgata's Shadow: an item that would cause countless Thieves to drool over it, was quietly sitting right in front of him! It was right within reach and so readily available as well! This sort of situation would cause not only him but anyone to feel like they were on [cloud nine](#)!

Chapter 87 – Sulgata's Boots

Nie Yan picked up the wooden case and carefully removed the lid. Almost immediately, like the rolling tides, swells of magical energy began diffusing into the expanse of the tomb. The source of such a phenomenon was a shimmering pair of fine boots situated quietly within the case.

No mistake, this is it! Nie Yan inwardly exclaimed. He nearly choked from his own excitement when he was greeted by the dazzling radiance of these boots.

In his previous life, Legendary-grade items were out of reach existences he could never hope to obtain. Although the item in his hands was merely a fragment, its price was high enough to make people faint. Even when he advanced into a Great Thief in the later years of the game, he had only been able to obtain a single fragment from a different Legendary-grade item. It was part of a breastplate only Fighters could equip, and for the sake of putting food on the table and supporting himself, he reluctantly sold it. With the money he obtained from selling the fragment, he was able to purchase a full set of Dark Gold equipment and enough Fortune Gems to upgrade said set to +9 while still having more than enough leftover to cover his living expenses.

Given this example, one could well imagine how high a price an intact Legendary item could fetch.

Sulgata's Shadow was divided into three fragments: Sulgata's Boots, Sulgata's Feather, and Sulgata's Cloth.

He needed to collect them for the remnant magical energy to restore the boots to its original form.

Sulgata's Boots (Legendary)

Requirement: 130 Strength

Description

A fragment of Sulgata's Shadow that had been broken into three pieces. These boots have remnant magical power and thus can still be equipped. The player must seek out the other fragments, as all three, Sulgata's Boots, Sulgata's Feather, and Sulgata's Cloth, are required to restore Sulgata's Shadow.

Properties: Dexterity +30, Speed +10, Jump +10, Stealth +10, Cloaking +10, Reflex +10.

Steal (Rank 3): Allows the player to steal money or items from other players or monsters.

Shadow Dance (Rank 3): Stealth +30, Cloaking +30, Speed +30; cannot be detected through Stealth for 6 s upon activation. Afterwards, Stealth has a chance of being seen through.

As a fragment of a Legendary item, the properties of Sulgata's Boots were indeed astonishing. It raised Speed, Jump, Stealth, Cloaking, and Reflex uniformly. Moreover, it also bestowed upon the player two additional skills, Steal and Shadow Dance, both of which were rank three. They were high level skills that could only be learned once the player reached Level 30. Not to mention, if the player wanted to improve these skills to rank three, they needed to be at least Level 40 or higher.

Steal enabled a Thief to reap additional profits from players or monsters. However, only items from a player's bag could be stolen, meaning Thieves were unable to steal gear directly equipped on a player's body. The success rate of the skill and what sort of item was stolen depended on the level gap between the Thief and the target; though, the formula for calculating the rate was complicated since many variables besides level were also factored in. Generally, successful uses of the skill stole money from the

target, and in some rare circumstances, equipment and other items could be stolen as well. As for Shadow Dance, it was quite useful for retreating or stealthily approaching a target since a multitude of things could be done within six seconds. Despite that, even if the player's Stealth couldn't be seen through, it didn't mean they were invincible. All it meant was the opponent wouldn't be able to see them. In other words, after the first six seconds of the skill, the opponent had a chance of detecting the player every three-second interval, which counted as a round within the game. If the opponent failed to detect the player, they would continue every round until the player revealed themselves or their Stealth was seen through.

“One hundred thirty strength? Ah... Why does it have to be so high?” Nie Yan wrinkled his brows. He was still seventy-three strength away from being able to use it. Such a high requisite was extremely harsh for him, especially since Thieves mainly focused on Dexterity while Strength was only secondary to them. If he put everything into Strength now, levelling in the future would become much more difficult. Fortunately, Sulgata's Boots somewhat made up for it by providing thirty Dexterity. “God dammit! Why did I have to end up losing ten Strength!?”

Assuming they worked hard, an average player would probably need to be Level 40 or higher to put sixty points in Strength. If their equipment was good, however, then it was possible to have one hundred and thirty Strength by around Level 30.

Had Nie Yan not been cursed and permanently lost ten Strength, he would've reached one hundred and thirty Strength by Level 25.

Now I have to wait until Level 30 to equip this.

I'll have to come up with a way to make up for this loss... Earlier, when he had noticed Sulgata's Boots gave him rank three Steal, his eyes had lit up with anticipation. He knew better than anyone else what it meant to have Steal, let alone obtaining it at rank three, prior to Level 30.

Getting one hundred thirty Strength before Level 30 wasn't impossible. In fact, after thinking over it some more, it was possible for him to reach it by Level 15!

Of course, there was a time and place for everything, and now wasn't the time to be thinking about such things. The moment Nie Yan stuffed Sulgata's Boots into his bag, Dark Gladiator suddenly trembled, causing him to feel an emerging sense of crisis. It wasn't suitable to stay in this tomb any longer. He needed to flee, immediately!

Just as he planned to turn his head and flee, a terrifying scene played out before his eyes. The mummified corpse of Seres Tothe suddenly moved, and a pale cyan flame ignited in his eye sockets. Albeit an insignificant ember, it pulsed and gradually grew in intensity.

Without a doubt, this was the signal for him to retreat, lest he planned to lose his life. This mummified son of bitch wants to revive!

Nie Yan didn't dare to dally and dashed toward the exit.

However, to his dismay, the pond he had emerged out of became sealed as larger and larger boulders came crashing down!

From the moment he opened the sarcophagus, his escape route had already been blocked.

Nie Yan glanced at the Return Scroll in his bag. Good! I can still use it! He had already checked earlier, but this confirmed it. The tomb wasn't a sealed room; he could at least teleport out!

In the next instant, the tall armoured corpse slowly rose from its sarcophagus.

Shit, there's no time... The Return Scroll needs twenty seconds to activate!

In spite of that, he quickly put aside these thoughts and began channeling the scroll. As the ancient script within the scroll glowed with ever increasing intensity, a faint radiance soon enveloped him and a bright teleportation circle appeared beneath his feet.

The seconds seemed to stretch longer and longer.

By now, Seres Tothe, or more accurately his corpse, had fully arisen. Wearing a full set of golden armour, it wielded an equally dazzling longsword in its hands and emanated the aura of a ruler.

In life, he was a powerful lord who governed over Sulgata. After

his death, he was buried in this tomb and eventually turned undead like the other inhabitants of the city.

Seres Tothe (Lord): Level 15

Health: 50,000/50,000

A Lord-class monster possessed a terrifying amount of health. Nie Yan knew that if an elite team of Level 15 players came, they'd stand no chance of defeating Seres Tothe. Discussing the possibility of him defeating this boss by himself was even less necessary. If he was even just a step too slow, he would subsequently lose his life.

Three seconds... Four seconds... Five seconds... He impatiently counted down as time seemed to slow to a crawl.

Nie Yan felt like he was going to explode from the nervousness building in his heart.

In the next second, the pale cyan flames in Seres Tothe's eyes locked onto Nie Yan and, while his entire person emanating a powerful aura of death, began walking toward him, nearing ever closer with every step.

At Nie Yan's level, Seres Tothe's damage was simply too monstrous. There would be little suspense if they fought. With a single slash of that sword, his body would be cleanly bisected while his health bar fell to zero. It was impossible for him to withstand a single attack. Even if he was a Fighter, the end result would be the same.

Seres Tothe gradually drew closer, and the sense of crisis bore down on him even more intensely, yet he couldn't move a single step. Otherwise, the Return Scroll's channeling would be interrupted.

"Crap, just a little bit longer... Wait!" Nie Yan turned his head and glanced at Dark Gladiator, who patiently awaited his command, and ordered it to hold off Seres Tothe.

Without the slightest hesitation, Dark Gladiator lumbered over, brushed past his side, and then stood in front of him in order to obstruct Seres Tothe. Although it was a being with minimal intelligence, it still possessed an innate fear and reverence toward the existence that lay ahead. However, its loyalty and drive to protect Nie Yan was even more absolute. With the sliver of consciousness in its mind, Dark Gladiator understood it was heading toward its demise; however, regardless of all costs, it would protect its master to the bitter end.

Chapter 88 – Escape

Before the imposing five-meter tall Seres Tothe, Dark Gladiator appeared to be naught but a feeble house gecko.

The golden armoured lord, who resembled a titan that had resurrected from antiquity, emanated an oppressive aura.

Things would dangerous if Seres Tothe was allowed to get within striking range!

Upon receiving Nie Yan's command, Dark Gladiator suddenly soared into the air and then, after reaching an optimal height, plummeted towards the earth in an attempt to dive-bomb its opponent.

Seeing Dark Gladiator coming at him, the pale cyan flames in Seres Tothe's eyes pulsated. He gazed over the frail skeleton dragon, his eyes showing utter disdain, and raised his arm up towards it. With a single flick of the wrist, he sent it crashing into the ground before it even had a chance to reach him.

「BOOM!」Dark Gladiator fell to the ground and tumbled along until finally colliding with one of the tomb walls.

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Seres Tothe's damage was truly terrifying. Even Dark Gladiator,

who possessed a formidable defense, instantly lost over twenty percent of its health in a single strike.

Dark Gladiator stumbled back to its feet and charged toward Seres Tothe once more.

If Dark Gladiator couldn't hold off the boss, then Nie Yan would have no hope of escaping.

It was truly an unfortunate situation, as a servant like Dark Gladiator was hard to come by. However, in a life or death plight such as this, he didn't really have any other choice. Besides, there wasn't much time left on Undead Rite.

Once Dark Gladiator drew near, it pounced on Seres Tothe and latched onto his waist, firmly refusing to loosen its grasp. However, Seres Tothe simply raised his golden longsword. 「Slash!」 A streak of light cleaved through Dark Gladiator's shoulder and cleanly lopped off its arm. He then followed with an elbow strike, which knocked aside the frail bone dragon like a ragdoll.

Like most undead, Seres Tothe's actions were extremely clumsy and stiff. Because of this, Dark Gladiator was just barely able to avoid a fatal blow.

However, the undead dragon was only hanging on by a thread. With merely twenty-one percent of its health left, it wouldn't be able to withstand another one of Seres Tothe's attacks.

Now, with Dark Gladiator nearly out of commission, Nie Yan felt as though his heart would burst from anxiety. Although Dark

Gladiator had slightly hindered Seres Tothe's movements, it still failed at holding him back.

Twelve seconds... Fourteen seconds... Fifteen seconds...

The plan had failed, Seres Tothe couldn't be stopped. Now, the golden armoured lord was standing before him, his massive body loomed over Nie Yan ominously. Seres Tothe's sword flickered with a sharp light as he gradually raised it high above his head. Nie Yan knew only one thing was certain, he'd die if he allowed that sword to hit him!

Staring at the sword, Nie Yan couldn't help but imagine himself being chopped in half. He quickly glanced over at Dark Gladiator who was still struggling to get up. C'mon! C'mon! Hurry up!

Dark Gladiator crawled back to its feet. Though it still appeared to be somewhat unsteady, it charged at Seres Tothe once again.

「Bang!」Just as Seres Tothe's sword was about to come down on Nie Yan and cleave him in half, Dark Gladiator rammed its skeletal frame into Seres Tothe and caused him to stumble. Seemingly infuriated that a lower being had caused him to stagger, Seres Tothe brandished his longsword and attacked.

A cold arc of light followed his sword as it slashed across Dark Gladiator's skeletal frame, splitting it in half. The bone dragon's halves collapsed to the ground and shattered.

After turning Dark Gladiator into a pile of bone fragments, Seres Tothe turned its attention back to the other pest that he had been too preoccupied to deal with.

Eighteen... Nineteen... Twenty!

However, by then, the Return Scroll had already finished channeling. A bright radiance shone from the teleportation circle beneath Nie Yan's feet as he disappeared from the tomb.

The scenery in front of Nie Yan changed as he emerged from Calore's transfer point. Yet, despite his successful escape, his heart was still racing. I finally got away from that bastard. It's unfortunate I ended up losing Dark Gladiator in the process though...

Ah, whatever. There was nothing else I could've done. Even if I didn't sacrifice him, he would've disappeared soon anyway.

Nevertheless, he had still accomplished his objective, which was retrieving Sulgata's Boots. Now he just needed to figure out how he could equip them as quickly as possible.

「Where are you guys?」Nie Yan messaged Young Seven and his crew.

「We've already returned to Calore. We're at the alchemy shop right now,」Young Seven replied. They had actually returned pretty early on to restock. Since there were simply too many mobs

in Sulgata, they ended up burning through their supply of consumables fairly quickly.

「Alright, meet me at the auction house.」

「No problem. See ya there.」

...

After some time, Young Seven and his team arrived at the auction house and spotted Nie Yan waiting just outside.

“Nice to see you,” Nie Yan greeted and nodded his head in acknowledgement. If it wasn’t for their help back in Sulgata, he wouldn’t have been able to find those gems or retrieve Sulgata’s Boots.

“Likewise,” Young Seven replied, followed by Forgotten and the others who joined in.

“Did you complete your quest?” Forgotten asked. He didn’t bother to pry any further than that though, as the contents of Nie Yan’s quest were his business and his alone.

“I completed it.” Nie Yan nodded in reply. “According to my original offer, I owe you all a Gold-grade piece of equipment.”

“It’s fine. You don’t need to compensate us,” Young Seven

replied.

“Two of your members ended up dying. I can’t just leave you empty-handed! How would I be able to live with myself?” Nie Yan insisted and sent Young Seven a trade request. He held a favourable impression of Young Seven and his team. They were sincere and kept to their word. He’d be sure to keep in contact with them in the future.

Urged by Nie Yan, Young Seven finally hit accept, which brought up a trade window in front of him. However, when he saw the item that appeared in the window, his eyes widened in surprise.

It was a pair of shoulder guards for Fighters! Although it could only be equipped at Level 10, it didn’t detract from the fact that it was definitely a good piece of equipment! Strength +13, and Resilience +17... This sort of item would definitely sell for at least thirty silvers or higher on the marketplace!

Young Seven initially thought Nie Yan would simply give them some random piece of Gold-grade equipment. After all, even the most average pieces of Gold-grade equipment were still quite expensive since their base properties were innately higher. Never did he imagine that Nie Yan would actually give him something of such high quality. He no longer had any plans of refusing Nie Yan’s kindness. Otherwise, he’d be failing his responsibility as a leader to his team. A Fighter’s defense played an incredibly significant role in most teams.

“Since you insist, refusing would be impolite. Brother Nie Yan, if anything comes up and you need our help, please don’t hesitate to

ask. We'll definitely do our best to lend a helping hand!" Young Seven said in a truly sincere manner, unlike earlier when he was putting on a pretense of being polite.

Truthfully, Nie Yan did in fact plan to give them an ordinary Gold-grade item in his bag. However, when he saw them giving an earnest effort to help him, to the point of even losing two of their members in the process, he changed his mind. He definitely couldn't let them suffer a loss. Besides, he didn't mind giving it away since it wasn't an item he could equip. As for the money he could have potentially received from selling it, he couldn't care less for an amount he considered pocket change.

Nie Yan would have ended up disliking Young Seven if he had continued refusing out of politeness. He preferred people who were straightforward with their actions and didn't mince their words. These kinds of people were easier to interact with; plus, they weren't hypocrites. He glanced at Young Seven, then at the members in the back. "If I need any help in the future, I'll keep you guys in mind. I might even ask you to form a team with me."

"We'd gladly oblige!" Forgotten interrupted from the side. They never had a set team in the first place, and though they liked the idea of forming one, they always lacked the time. Nie Yan's willingness to form a team with them was exactly what they were looking for. When they had met him near the pyramid earlier, they actually came with the intention of recruiting him. However, in retrospect, that didn't seem all too likely. Naturally, after witnessing his prowess, they realized their little temple was too small to host a deity like Nie Yan.

The game servers had barely been open for about two weeks, so the number of players capable of forming a team were few. For Nie Yan to win over so many exceptional players during this period was without a doubt an extremely good opportunity. However, it wasn't like his current circumstances were all that bad either. He was able to frequently collect good items, farm high-level monsters, and occasionally join with other teams in dungeon runs.

Nie Yan continued chatting with Young Seven, Forgotten, and the others a little longer, which caused his impression of them to grow even more favourable. Eventually, he added all of them to his friends list so it would be easier to contact each other in the future.

Chapter 89 – Trading The Lion King’s Shield

While chatting with Young Seven and the others, Nie Yan abruptly received a call.

「You’re in the city? I’ve already got the twenty silvers. Tell me where you are, and I’ll head over there shortly.」

The person on the other end of the call was Resplendent Bladelight.

「I’m just outside the auction house.」

「[Alright](#), wait for me. I’ll be there soon.」

“It was one of my acquaintances. He’s coming here to meet me,” Nie Yan informed Young Seven and the others.

“Ah, no problem. We aren’t exactly in a hurry to do anything right now, so we can continue chatting for a while longer,” Young Seven replied. After finding out that Nie Yan was interested in forming a team, he began to weigh his options. Should he proceed with his original plan, or should he follow Nie Yan? He had always liked the idea of forming his own team, but after realizing that he lacked skilled players, he decided, albeit reluctantly, to stall this pursuit for a later date. Even so, he still couldn’t help but feel a little unenthusiastic about the prospect of joining another person’s team.

Bladelight soon arrived in the area and began heading towards the auction house. On the way there, he spotted Nie Yan chatting with a few others near the entrance and promptly headed over.

“Hello,” Bladelight greeted Nie Yan.

Young Seven and the others were inwardly shocked by Bladelight’s appearance as they gazed at his equipment in awe. He was clad in silver-white armour and was holding an extravagant, golden shield in his left hand. Be it the armour or shield, from the design of the equipment and the runes engraved on their surface, they could immediately discern that his equipment was certainly out of the ordinary.

That’s some amazing equipment! Young Seven, Forgotten, and the rest couldn’t help but have this first impression in their collective mind.

Bladelight wasn’t in a particularly a good mood as a hint of dejection could be seen on his face. Seemingly, the matter Nie Yan warned him about had likely already occurred, and this was reinforced by the fact that the guild emblem he previously wore on his chest was now gone.

“You left the guild? Nie Yan asked.

“It was a trash guild. I wouldn’t have been happy staying there any longer,” Bladelight replied in a riled up manner.

Nie Yan figured Bladelight must've had a falling out with Hei Zhuo (Black Amazing) after hearing his response, and considering the lack of a guild emblem on his chest, arriving at such a conclusion was par for the course. Regardless of who it was, no one would be in the right frame of mind after finding out their lover and best friend were having an affair together behind their back, hence Bladelight's departure from his guild. Speaking of which, the sole reason the guild Bladelight and Hei Zhuo founded together, Unhindered, had reached such soaring heights in his previous life was because of Bladelight's prestige. It wasn't until later, when their expansion stabilized, that his influence waned due to the hidden machinations Hei Zhuo employed to seize full control of the guild. However, at present, Nie Yan's actions had unwittingly left Unhindered teetering on the brink of collapse right in the midst of their growth!

"It's just a guild. Nothing to get down over," said Nie Yan as he attempted to comfort him. Although Bladelight could be somewhat overbearing, his overall character wasn't bad; otherwise, he wouldn't have gone out of his way to warn Bladelight about Hei Zhuo.

"Haha, no worries! I'm not taking things too hard." Bladelight forced a smile. Though he wore an uncaring expression, his inner feelings were anything but. He was the only one who truly knew his own feelings regarding the matter; however, he would never share these thoughts in public. He had already thrown away enough face in front of this person.

If he didn't wish to bring this topic up, then Nie Yan had no reason to rub salt in an open wound.

“Well, since you’ve left your guild, have you found a new team by any chance?” Nie Yan asked. In his previous life, Bladelight was ranked as one of the top three Fighters in the game. Without a team supporting him, would he still be able to reach such heights?

“No, I still haven’t. Why, you decided to form one?”

“Yeah, I’ve been thinking about it.”

“Well, if you’re able to establish a fixed team, I wouldn’t mind joining. However, let me say this in advance. If I don’t see any signs of this team being successful in the future, I’ll probably leave,” replied Bladelight in a rather frank manner. Although it was somewhat unpleasant to the ear, at least he was speaking truthfully, which was much better than those hypocrites who put on a facade of friendliness.

“No problem, do as you wish. I’m just forming one for the fun of it. The only thing I’ll ask of everyone is to gather once in a while to run dungeons together. I don’t plan on restricting the freedom of my members or anything,” Nie Yan replied. He had always been a relaxed person, and he didn’t want to go through the trouble of managing a team. If a team wished to retain their players, especially those who could overcome the challenges of a dungeon, restricting their freedom wasn’t the way to achieve it. Instead, there needed to be a balance of goodwill, loyalty, and enticing prospects in order to encourage members to stay.

Nie Yan’s goal was to have an elite team that surpassed all other elites at his disposal, one that could help him obtain the best equipment. Once he possessed a group of loyal followers, he’d be

able to gather them for dungeon runs while giving them helpful pointers and advice. In doing so, he would be able to slowly nurture his forces.

Nonetheless, Nie Yan still preferred to act on his own. Not to mention, his knowledge of the game far exceeded that of any other player. Even if he continued walking the path of a solo player, he'd still be able to become an incredibly powerful Thief.

“That sounds fine too. Just give me call whenever you plan a raid,” Bladelight said.

“It’s still a bit early right now, so I’ll let you know in a few days.”

Meanwhile, Young Seven had been listening in on their conversation from the side and was becoming riled up. If Nie Yan was capable of recruiting a Fighter who already had such amazing equipment, then there definitely wouldn’t be any harm in joining his team. For their hodgepodge group of players, finding a good Fighter had always been an incredibly frustrating task.

“Whenever you’re ready, count us in too!” Young Seven interjected.

“Alright.” Nie Yan nodded. His team now included a Fighter in the top three, one of the Seven Great Priests, and a Thief that had once been on par with him. Tang Yao’s damage was still passable, and he wouldn’t have any problem recruiting a few more Mages with high magic damage either. Then, if he found a few more reliable members, he’d have the makings of an elite team.

Only after a little bit of chatting, Nie Yan received another call. This time it was Stone.

「Expert, are you busy today?」

「Why? What is it?」

「Erm... The game developers released an announcement that a new dungeon called Sosil Valley will be opening tomorrow. Since we want to be one of the first to explore the dungeon, our guild rescheduled the Agmota Muddy Swamplands run to today,」Stone replied. He felt rather embarrassed. Earlier they had discussed with Nie Yan and decided that the run would occur tomorrow, but now they had suddenly moved it to today.

「That's alright. I don't have any other plans for today. There should be enough time for a run.」When Sosil Valley opened tomorrow, he would patiently wait until the players burned through the current supply of Black Phenol on the marketplace. Then, once the supply dried up, he would distribute his own stock at a gradual pace. However, that would be left for tomorrow. There wasn't much time left in the day, so he might as well spend it doing a dungeon run.「I have a few friends with me, so let me say goodbye to them first. Let me know when and where we're meeting up.」

「In five minutes at the Calore transfer point.」

「Gotcha.」

After ending the call with Stone, Nie Yan turned around to face Bladelight, Young Seven, and the others, and said, “Sorry guys. It seems my friends want me to run Agmota Muddy Swamplands with them. Let’s meet up again some other time.”

“No worries, I was planning to go off and grind some mobs anyway. Let’s get this trade out of the way and then I’ll head off,” replied Bladelight as he nodded his head.

Young Seven, Forgotten, and the rest gazed at Nie Yan with envious expressions. They had yet to form a fixed team and were already having a hard enough time finding players to run even the simplest of dungeons, let alone a high level dungeon like Agmota Muddy Swamplands. This bit of information only firmed the resolve in Young Seven’s mind. Following Nie Yan would definitely be the right choice. Since it seemed other teams frequently invited him to join them in their dungeon runs, they could probably benefit a lot from his guidance.

Nie Yan traded the Lion King’s Shield to Bladelight, making his bag twenty silvers heavier. Afterwards, he said goodbye to all of them and headed for the transport point.

Upon receiving the item, Bladelight impatiently swapped out his current shield with the new one. The Lion King’s Shield was an exceptionally stable tower shield with a brown, metallic hue. Moreover, the entire shield was reinforced by magic and emitted a dazzling, golden aura.

Chapter 90 – Holy Empire's Elite Team

“What’s the quality of that shield?” Young Seven hesitantly asked. The brilliance coming from the Lion King’s Shield could be described as dazzling. If this really was a Gold-grade shield, he could scarcely imagine the sort of price it would fetch if it was put on the auction house.

“Gold-grade. Nie Yan sold it to me,” Bladelight replied.

“For how much?”

“Not much. He gave me a friend discount, so it was only twenty silver,” answered Bladelight. Speaking of which, aside from the shield, he probably owed Nie Yan a few favours now.

Young Seven was slightly envious; Bladelight definitely received a great bargain. If a shield of that quality were to appear on the marketplace, it wouldn’t be sold for anything less than thirty silver, quite possibly even more. Although players sold items to friends below market price, such a deep discount was certainly on the rare side. Unless Nie Yan’s pockets were overflowing with money, no one would give away such a great shield for that low of a price. Yet in retrospect, this was most likely the case. Could a person who casually gave away Gold-grade equipment like they were stickers really be lacking in money?

From the way Nie Yan normally acted, handled affairs, and treated his friends, they could tell he wasn’t stingy when it came to his own people.

After Nie Yan's departure, Young Seven and company continued chatting with Bladelight.

"You guys wanna come level with me?" Bladelight offered.

"Sure, we'd love to!"

"But before that... You know the shield you switched out? Would it be possible for you to sell it to us?"

"Sure, I don't have any use for it anymore anyway. Since you're Nie Yan's friends, I'd feel embarrassed taking too much. Let's see... How does five silver sound? I had to take out a few loans from friends in order to buy that shield, and I still have to pay them back, so that's the best I can do," Bladelight replied. This was practically factory price. The Leo Shield he switched out absolutely wasn't worth only this much. The sole reason he gave them such a bargain was out of respect for Nie Yan.

"Deal!" Young Seven exclaimed in an excited manner. When he gazed at the Leo Shield's properties, he knew he got it for considerably cheap. And just like that, their party obtained a rather decent shield.

When Nie Yan arrived in the general area, he saw Sleepy Fox and over a dozen others, totalling almost twenty players, already gathered and waiting at the transport point.

The equipment on their bodies was quite extravagant. The Arcane Mages were all suited in the Dark Winter set, and Priests, the Radiant Prayer set. The gear of the Warriors was out of the ordinary as well. For such a gaudy assembly to not attract attention while gathered around the transport point was nigh impossible

The players in the vicinity were awestruck and were making inquiries about the identities of these elites.

“Which guild does that team belong to?”

“What? How you could not recognize them? They’re from Holy Empire. The player wearing the silver-white armour, that’s their leader, Sleepy Fox!”

The Holy Empire players felt their hearts well with pride but even more so with arrogance as these passing murmurs entered their ears. Each of them was an elite carefully selected by the top brass of their guild. Even in the previous VRMMOs before Conviction, they had all been members of Holy Empire.

Sleepy Fox glanced at the stream of players entering from the main street and happened to spot Nie Yan walking amidst the crowd.

“He’s here,” Sleepy Fox declared to his teammates.

Without exception, every member of the team turned their gaze

toward Nie Yan. None of them understood why their captain, Sleepy Fox, held this Thief in such high esteem. Who among them wasn't a handpicked veteran elite? They were thoroughly unconvinced by this stranger.

Many of these members were unfamiliar with Nie Yan, some even expressing misgivings, but regardless of their opinion, all eyes were focused on him. However, even while under the scrutiny of their gazes, Nie Yan remained quite collected as he directly made his way to Sleepy Fox.

As soon as they made eye contact, Sleepy Fox acknowledged him with a slight nod. He could tell how much ability a person had from the way they carried themselves. Only by having self-confidence could a person achieve success.

"Expert, you've arrived!" Stone was the first one to step out and greet him.

"Mhm..." Nie Yan acknowledged Stone's greeting, then turned to face Sleepy Fox. "We meet again."

"Indeed," answered Sleepy Fox.

Dusk was also there amongst the group. After running Treant Forest together, the two could be considered well acquainted, so he also stepped forward and greeted Nie Yan with a smile.

While the four chatted, the surrounding members were surprised

to discover that, despite their captain being the prestigious guild leader of Holy Empire, Nie Yan's presence was not the least bit inferior, as he spoke in neither a subservient nor overbearing tone. Not only this, but at many points in the conversation, he was the one taking the leading role. After witnessing such a scene unfold, the identity of this Thief once more became shrouded in a veil of mystery.

“I hear he's some expert who's already cleared Agmota Muddy Swamplands, and this time around, he's only here to guide us through the dungeon.”

“How is that possible? In the entire server, there are only several dozen teams who've cleared Agmota Muddy Swamplands. Are you sure?”

“It should be, right..?” The person who spoke had never personally confirmed this fact, so his confident tone immediately faltered.

The members behind Sleepy Fox quietly discussed amongst themselves, occasionally stealing glances at the equipment on Nie Yan's body in order to determine whether he had really cleared Agmota Muddy Swamplands only to quickly find themselves disappointed. He didn't have a single piece of equipment on him that came from that dungeon, but that didn't mean his equipment was ordinary either. In fact, it was quite extraordinary—this was undeniable.

“Brother Nie, will you be leading us through the dungeon this time around?” asked Sleepy Fox. He fixedly stared at Nie Yan as if

he was trying to figure something out from the other party's expression while even making conjectures about his background. Then, he lowered his gaze and glanced at the dagger by Nie Yan's hip. He could discern that its quality was of at least Gold-grade.

Sleepy Fox's words immediately attracted the attention of the members around him.

"It doesn't matter to me. If you wish to lead, I'll simply follow your pace. However, if you want me to guide all of you, beside first dibs on all Thief drops, I also want the Unknown Transfer Scroll that drops from the Manticore King," Nie Yan calmly replied. It's not as if he didn't know Sleepy Fox was trying to probe him. He figured Sleepy Fox also wouldn't be so rash as to easily hand over the leadership of this run to him.

What kind of arrogant tone is that? The members behind Sleepy Fox couldn't help having this thought. Each and every one of them was filled with indignation. Just who the hell does this guy think he is?

Nie Yan acted as if he didn't notice the uproar he caused and simply stared at Sleepy Fox while awaiting his response. If Sleepy Fox couldn't make up his mind, he'd simply withdraw from this dungeon run and enter later with his own team.

Though, truthfully, the Unknown Transfer Scroll was an extremely attractive item that he'd like to obtain early on. Although it was just another consumable, to Nie Yan, it held incredible value!

Even though many of the members of the team doubted Nie Yan's abilities, Dusk and Stone held their belief in him firm, and they quickly intervened to pacify their enraged teammates.

At this point in time, Sleepy Fox finally took notice of Nie Yan's level. His heart shook in surprise, and he couldn't help but recall what Stone had told him. When Stone first met him, Nie Yan had been a complete beginner, fresh at Level 0. Yet now, only several days later, Nie Yan had already reached Level 6 and caught up right to his footsteps. Wasn't his levelling speed a bit too monstrous? When Nie Yan had informed them that he deleted his old character and restarted, he hadn't really been convinced. However, the evidence in front of him clearly stated otherwise. Not to mention, if he didn't delete and start over, how could he be so informed. How else would he be able to reach Level 6 in such a short period of time?

Perhaps Nie Yan really did have some ability.

Chapter 91 – Trembling Milo's House

Sleepy Fox pondered for a moment before coming to a decision. He turned around and swept his strict gaze over each and every member, quelling the uproar with but a glance.

This very scene evidenced just how influential Sleepy Fox was to his team.

“Everyone, listen up! I’m going to dissolve our team and have Brother Nie invite you into his own. Today, he’ll be acting as the leader of this run in my stead,” informed Sleepy Fox to his team.

Another commotion erupted from the crowd as players looked at each other in dismay. For their captain to allow a complete stranger to lead them through a run, this was the first time such an event had ever occurred. What if he didn’t know what he was doing and caused them to wipe? If that happened, then wouldn’t they all end up losing twenty percent of their experience bar?!

“Captain, how is that alright? Please reconsider!”

“Yes, please reconsider! What’ll happen if we end up getting wiped?”

“Can we trust in his ability? Does he even have any?”

“If I say it’s alright, then it’s alright. Now enough chit chat, hurry up and accept the invite. I want you all to follow Brother

Nie's orders as if they were mine. If you still refuse to listen, then don't blame me for kicking you out of the team. Also, to anyone who doesn't put in their full effort and causes us to fail the run... Well, I'm sure you already understand what the consequences are," Sleepy Fox replied sternly. He followed a simple principle: Those he felt were incompetent would never be relied upon, and those he relied upon would never be doubted! If Nie Yan was going to act as team captain, a role which required Sleepy Fox to put his faith in him, then he would grant him the highest authority.

After watching the video of him leading another team through Treant Forest, Sleepy Fox also felt a veil of mystery hanging over this person.

When their captain responded in such a way, they had no choice but to accept his decision, and the members who had expressed dissatisfaction promptly fell into silence. They all understood an order given by their captain could not be violated lest they be expelled from the guild. From the very beginning, Sleepy Fox had always ruled over his subordinates with an iron fist.

Nie Yan slightly nodded his head in approval. In both discipline and strength, Holy Empire's elite team was far above Yu Lan's (Blue Feather) team. The difference in atmosphere and quality was almost palpable. They certainly didn't have a smug bastard like Chen Bo who put everyone beneath his eyes. Even though several Thieves were rather unhappy with their captain's arrangements with Nie Yan, they absolutely wouldn't dare to voice their dissatisfaction.

「System: Sleepy Fox has joined your team.」

「System: Flying Stone has joined your team.」

In a brief few moments, a thirty-player team was formed. Although Nie Yan was the captain of the team, it was still under Holy Empire's name.

“Alright, now to inspect your stats. Mages, announce your magic damage; Fighters, announce your defense; and Priests, announce the strength of your Lesser Heal.”

And so, in a quick and orderly fashion, each member reported their respective stats. Nie Yan reviewed the information of these players. All of their equipment was excellent, and except for three players who were slightly lacking, everyone's stats met the minimum requirements for clearing Agmota Muddy Swamplands on expert difficulty. Before they set off, Nie Yan ordered those three players to purchase a few scrolls.

“Is there anything else we need? We've already bought enough Anti-Paralysis Potions,” asked Sleepy Fox. He had a certain premonition, which made him believe Nie Yan wouldn't merely be leading them through Agmota Muddy Swamplands on easy or normal. Otherwise, why else would he have had ordered some of their players buy scrolls to supplement their stats? Their team absolutely possessed the raw stats to conquer the dungeon on those difficulties without using such items.

“Which of you Fighters have Demoralizing Shout?” Nie Yan swept his gaze over the group but received no response.

“I have it,” Sleepy Fox answered. He felt bewildered and surprised by Nie Yan’s sudden question. Did clearing Agmota Muddy Swamplands really require such a high-level skill?

“Alright, not bad!” Nie Yan nodded. He didn’t explain himself and proceeded to the Priests. “How many of you have Dispel?”

All five Priests in the crowd promptly raised their hands in response.

Sleepy Fox did have some brains. He understood Dispel was extremely useful and didn’t spare expenses to obtain the skill for each of his Priests. Naturally, the only reason he could do so was because his guild had a strong foundation since even a single Dispel skill book cost quite a pretty penny.

“How many of your Paladins have Repel Evil?”

“One,” Sleepy Fox answered.

Nie Yan wrinkled his brows.

“It’s not enough?” asked Sleepy Fox after seeing Nie Yan’s change in expression.

“Then what about Remove Blind?”

“None.”

“We’ll need to purchase two Repel Evil skill books and a Remove Blind skill book then. It’s also best if you have your Shadow Priest learn Ensnare, but unfortunately, that skill book is a bit too rare. So even if we don’t have it, we’ll just have to make do.”

“I need to buy a few things. So once you find those items, notify me, and I’ll be over shortly,” Nie Yan just recalled there was an essential item required to clear the dungeon. Following the end of their conversation, he left the transfer point area and headed for the northeast district.

Nie Yan wanted to buy two different items that were exceedingly useful at this early of a stage in the game. If not for the dungeon run being moved to today, he would’ve nearly forgotten about it.

The northeast district of Calore was basically one giant slum, and rows of dilapidated buildings ran along every street and pathway. Just about any point in the slum was accessible through an alleyway. The infrastructure of the district was incredibly complex, resembling one giant labyrinth, and it was quite easy for players who entered the area to lose their way in these narrow paths. Even the largest streets were merely two meters across while the much more numerous alleyways could only fit a single person.

Nie Yan entered the winding and twisting paths of the district. The alleys were paved with slabs of stone while trash collected at the sides of the buildings.

I wonder if I'll still be able to find it, Nie Yan pondered.

Countless forks in the path connected with each to form one giant, confusing network. It had been quite a while since he last visited this area, so his memories of it had become fuzzy and indistinct. Though no matter how vague these recollections were, he could only rely on them and fumble his way through while hopefully going along the correct path toward his destination.

The location he sought was extremely remote, so finding it wasn't a simple matter, especially since he only remembered the general direction it was in.

Hidden within this slum was actually a secret shop. The items sold there were decent, but they were too expensive and were only useful at the lower levels. He himself had only been to this shop two or three times in his previous life, specifically when he planned to run Agmota Muddy Swamplands and needed to purchase the necessary items. This was the main reason why he had suddenly recalled the existence of this shop when they were about to run the dungeon.

He meandered around the alleys for ten minutes, taking a wrong turn several times, before finally finding a certain house. He gazed over at the plaque that hung over a giant wooden gate.

「TREMBLING MILO'S HOUSE」

I think it's this place... Nie Yan was slightly hesitant. He vaguely

recalled that it did seem to have such a name.

No, this should be the place, Nie Yan reassured himself. He slowly pushed open the gate and entered the courtyard where he was greeted by the sight of a broken down thatch building.

His vague memories began clearing up. He had found the right place!

He walked past the dark hallways, down the staircase, and entered the basement. At the bottom, aged magic lamps shone through the darkness with a pale yellow glow.

Rather than saying this was a cellar, it was better to call it a display room for trash. The walls were lined with shelves that stocked with goods and various potion bottles filled with green, blue, red... liquids of all colours.

There, an unkempt old man with a scraggly beard in a worn robe was examining a potion bottle that he had just shaken in his hand. The old man noticed Nie Yan just as he walked down the staircase. "What do you want?" the old man greeted in a somewhat rude tone.

Then, a small window appeared in front of Nie Yan, displaying an assortment of special items.

Chapter 92 – Agmota

This old fogey had always been one to treat his customers in a cold and indifferent fashion, an attitude that hadn't changed one bit since Nie Yan had first met him in the previous timeline. When he stumbled upon this shop by accident back then, his level was already in the thirties. The items sold there were low-level and overpriced, so he only shopped there once or twice to buy a few things. As a result, he only vaguely remembered the location of the shop.

Very few players were willing to put in the time and effort to explore this area due to its remoteness, meaning even fewer were aware of this old man's existence. Perhaps aside from Nie Yan, no other players had yet to discover this shop, but this would change in the future. The slums of the northern district would be demolished and redeveloped into a new area for commerce. Despite that, Trembling Milo's House would somehow persist through this process and remain in business. The new commercial area would bring in players which finally led to the public uncovering him. However, the new exposure didn't stop this old man from continuing to price gouge his customers; thus, only well-off beginners would frequent the shop.

Nie Yan scanned over the merchandise listed in the window. The items he currently sought were two different scrolls and a particular pouch of dust: Web Scroll, Sheep Transformation Scroll, and Flash Powder.

He purchased ten pouches of Flash Powder for fifty coppers each, three Web Scrolls, and two Sheep Transformation Scrolls.

Milo was probably a Mage since he often created scrolls out of basic spells and offered them for sale. The scrolls Nie Yan bought contained Web and Sheep Transformation. Web was a spell that provided decent crowd control and could only be learned by Mages once they reached Level 10. The Web Scroll, however, could be activated by any player as soon as they hit Level 5. As for the Sheep Transformation spell, it couldn't be learned until Level 20. Correspondingly, the requirements of the spell were also lowered in scroll form. The caveat being these scrolls came at a hefty price, costing two and three silvers respectively.

The prices of the scrolls increased accordingly with the usefulness of the spells they contained.

These items were so costly that even Nie Yan, who was filthy rich, would feel a slight ache in his heart when employing them. Thus, they would only be used sparingly; otherwise, he'd be spending more money than he earned. Outside of the major guilds, perhaps no other players were willing to purchase these things.

When Nie Yan thought back to the previous timeline, he remembered he had been penniless at this level. If he had been able to, he would have broken copper coins in half just to save a little money, so how would he have been willing to use such items? Fortunately, his present circumstances were substantially different, so much so that he could be described as rich and imposing.

After purchasing the items, he left Trembling Milo's House and headed for the transfer point.

「We've gathered the skill books, and we're all ready to set off. We'll all need to hurry, though, since the servers go down in two hours,」Sleepy Fox messaged.

「I'll be there shortly,」Nie Yan replied.

The return trip was much quicker, and he soon arrived at the transfer point.

“You're here. Did you get what you needed?” Sleepy Fox greeted. He was quite curious. Just what did Nie Yan buy for him to take so long to return?

“Yeah, I got it.” Nie Yan nodded.

However, since Nie Yan didn't bother explaining, he wouldn't make any further inquiries.

With no other issues delaying them, everyone was ready to set off. Soon, the members of the team began stepping into the transfer point. Their destination was a small town called Nate, which meant “marshland settlement” in the Ancient Common language. Since the town was situated in a remote area, the price of the transfer was ten coppers per player.

Built in the middle of the marsh, Nate was besieged by poisonous beasts almost daily. This environment tempered the residents of the settlement into strong hunters, as evidenced by the ones who

regularly passed through the town entrance, carrying crossbows along with the day's hunt. The town's main source of income came from selling these animal products, so the goods that could be purchased from the shops were mostly claws, fur pelts, and other items along these lines. In addition, materials of much higher quality would spring up for sale every once in a while, making this place a paradise for players who focused on a crafting profession such as Tailoring.

After arriving in the town, Nie Yan and company didn't dally, promptly heading to the quest giver.

Unlike in Calore, the players on the street didn't seem too surprised by the emergence of Nie Yan, Sleepy Fox, and the rest. Since many major guilds passed through this town en route to Agmota Muddy Swamplands, such a strong entourage of players was no strange sight to them.

While walking through the town, Nie Yan and the others arrived at the entrance of an imposing manor. Not only was this the most luxurious home in town, possessing a style that befitted a residence constructed in the marshland, it also stood atop a small hill, filled with vibrant, lush willows and other plant life as it overlooked the rest of the town. A small path cut across the hill; despite its winds and curves, it lead directly to the manor.

All of the team members halted their steps and gazed at Nie Yan.

"I'll go receive the quest," Nie Yan announced to the team and then walked over to the entrance gates.

After pushing open the metal gate, he proceeded along the path and shortly arrived at the manor's doors. Then, he entered the building and walked straight past a luxurious looking living room, through a long a winding hallway, and into a dusky bedroom. Upon reaching his destination, he found an old man lying in bed, surrounded by numerous servants and townsfolk who stared at him with worried expressions. His complexion was sickly, and it looked like he was on his last breath.

“Mayor Monda was inflicted with the King Manticore's poison. If we don't find an antidote soon, he'll...”

“Ross! Stop speaking drivel!”

“I-I'm sorry...”

“Sigh... It's fine. At this point, the only thing that can save the mayor's life is the King Manticore's eye.”

「System: You've arrived at Mayor Monda's residence and accidentally overheard some discussion. The mayor has been poisoned by the King Manticore. The vile creatures of the marsh have taken many innocent lives.」

「System: Are you willing to save Mayor Monda by slaying the King Manticore and retrieving its eye?」

Yes!

「System: You speak out and agree to save the mayor's life. The townsfolk and servants cast a grateful gaze. You've received their respect. Your Influence in Nate has increased by 3.」

Players received three Influence when accepting the Agmota Muddy Wetlands quest for the first time. Subsequent attempts would garner no further benefits.

「System: Explore the Agmota Muddy Wetlands in search of the King Manticore. Please select a difficulty. (Easy, Normal, Hard, Expert, Specialist)」

Specialist!

「System: You've selected Specialist. All members will have their stats increased by 10%. Withdrawing from this instance is not possible.」

Once the quest was accepted, the team was not allowed to get into conflict with other players. In return, they received the protection of the town. So, if they were provoked by other players, the guards would come forward in their aid.

After receiving the quest, Nie Yan walked out of Mayor Monda's manor. If they completed the quest, they could return here to receive a certain reward.

Seeing Nie Yan come out of the gates, Sleepy Fox walked forward

to greet him. “Specialist? Are you confident we can beat it?”

“It should be fine,” Nie Yan replied. More accurately, it should be fine as long as no accidents occurred.

As usual, Nie Yan’s habit of not explaining things gave Sleepy Fox a headache. He simply couldn’t understand this person’s way of thinking. In comparison, Dusk was much more confident about this run. Although Agmota Muddy Wetlands was several tiers higher than Treant Forest in terms of difficulty, he still held absolute faith in Nie Yan’s skills.

The teammates who were unaware of the circumstances also felt shocked. Why was it Specialist? They all believed this had to be some sort of mistake. They had already run Agmota Muddy Wetlands three times but failed to clear it even once. In one of the runs, they had managed to reach the King Manticore, only to be defeated miserably shortly after. Their main tank possessed over one hundred and thirty defense and over three hundred and sixty health. Although these stats couldn’t be considered the best, they were still top-tier. In spite of this, the King Manticore demolished their frontline in a matter of seconds. Even now, the only reason they were willing to make another attempt was because their Priests had recently learned Radiant Barrier, a spell that could shield an ally from incoming damage.

Yet Nie Yan, in all his overbearing arrogance, had actually decided to pick Specialist. How could they not be incensed? It was fine if he wanted to court death, but why did he have to drag them along with him!?

Despite this, they had no choice but to swallow their indignation. The quest difficulty had already been selected, and there was no way to withdraw. Moreover, their guild leader, Sleepy Fox, hadn't voiced his opinion on the matter. Thus, they could only wait and see how this situation developed.

Chapter 93 – King Manticore

Nie Yan and the others walked along the trail that cut through the marsh and advanced south. As dusk encroached, the scenery around them gradually grew darker. They encountered few players enroute to the dungeon, so much of the journey was uneventful and even somewhat bleak.

After several minutes, Nie Yan and company arrived at a checkpoint in the middle of the trail. Just ahead were two watchtowers, one erected on each side of the path, and stationed in each of them was a crossbow-carrying NPC guard.

“Beyond this point is the King Manticore’s territory. This is a forbidden area, so please turn back,” one of the guards called out.

“We’re adventures who wish to proceed to Agmota. We’re seeking to slay the King Manticore and retrieves its eye in order to treat Mayor Monda’s poison,” Nie Yan replied in a tone that was standard for advancing the quest.

“So it was like this... Brave adventures, the King Manticore is a dangerous and vile creature. I advise you to bring items that can cure paralysis,” forewarned the guard. “The mayor’s life is at stake, so I hope your mission ends in success!” The two guards allowed Nie Yan and the rest of the team to pass.

As soon as he stepped past the watchtowers, the entire team was transported inside the instance.

On arrival, an intense stench of blood and decay assaulted their noses as it freely permeated the air. Numerous corpses scattered the bog; some were fresh while others had completely rotted away, leaving only skeletal remains behind. The temperature plummeted, steeply, turning the atmosphere to one of cold and gloom. Suffice to say, the environment inside the dungeon was noticeably different from the one outside.

Signs of death could be seen everywhere across this long stretch of marsh.

Ahead of Nie Yan and the team was a small den. Manticores usually gathered in prides, so their dens often contained ten to several dozen individuals. Some were tasked with hunting prey, and others stayed behind to rear the young. Prides were headed by an Alpha Manticore, a Leader-class monster, while the rest of the pride consisted of females and the young. Manticores were monsters possessing the head and body of a lion and a scorpion's poisonous tail. If struck by the stinger at the end of their tails, the player would become poisoned and lose a certain amount of health each second. Furthermore, there was also a chance of paralysis. Therefore, if the player didn't bring Anti-Paralysis Potions, they would end up maimed to death before the poison had any meaningful effect.

For the most part, as long as the team's Fighters made sure to cure their paralysis as soon they were inflicted with it, no problems should arise.

“How many Manticores do you think are in that den?”

“I already investigated. They number around sixteen,” Nie Yan replied. Since he was already at the front of the group, he had taken the initiative to survey their surroundings.

“Sixteen!? Oh my God!”

“When we ran it on Easy or Normal, the most we’d ever get was a group of five or six...”

All of the team members wore expressions of dismay. Manticores, with their high health, were notoriously difficult to deal with. This held even truer for the Alpha Manticore who was several times more powerful than their normal counterparts. Even on lower difficulties, they often faced great peril whenever they encountered a group of five or six Manticores. If they were careless for even a moment, their team would end up surrounded and killed.

Yet that den had sixteen of them! Even if they had received a ten percent stat boost, it was still impossible for them to deal with so many Manticores.

Nie Yan activated Transcendent Insight to examine the pride.

Alpha Manticore (Leader): Level 3

Health: 1830/1830

Manticore: Level 3

Health: 620/620

Although only one of the Manticores was a Leader-class monster, since Nie Yan and the team had entered the dungeon on Specialist, even the common mobs would have their health, defense, and other stats increased significantly, so if all of those Manticores came charging over, the team would undoubtedly end up wiping in an instant.

“The Manticores move as a group. Do you have any plans?” asked Sleepy Fox after he turned to Nie Yan. He had to admit, Nie Yan’s use of the crossbow in Treant Forest was ingenious, but that kind of tactic might not necessarily work against these Manticores.

The slow witted Treants simply weren’t on the same level as Manticores.

“If I entrusted this task to you, how would you deal with this?” replied Nie Yan with a question of his own.

Sleepy Fox wrinkled his brows. He wasn’t willing to show weakness in front of Nie Yan, so after pondering for a moment, he replied, “I’ve got an idea.”

Despite there being so many Manticores, he actually thought up a plan? It seems I’ve been underestimating him.

“Oh? How do you plan on clearing the den? Let’s go with your plan first, and I’ll follow along. Just tell me what I need to do,” Nie Yan replied before retreating to the side. He was trying to think of a way to gain the team’s trust. Otherwise, players might not follow

his instructions correctly during tense situations. If that were to frequently occur, they'd have no hope of overcoming the King Manticore.

In the event Sleepy Fox's plan failed to subjugate the Manticore and he acted afterwards, the team would naturally be more willing to accept his orders. On the flipside, if Sleepy Fox did actually succeed, he would be saved the effort of doing the work himself.

"Alright." Sleepy Fox thought for a while, then began arranging the members into formation. The foe was a pride of sixteen Manticores, so naturally, he was still somewhat nervous. After he was done, he faced Nie Yan and said, "None of my teammates are comparable to you, so I'll have to trouble you with aggroing the Manticores."

Nie Yan inspected Sleepy Fox's arrangements. The formation took advantage of the boulders and trees in the vicinity by positioning the frontliners in a chokepoint. The Mages were safe, as they occupied the high ground. The Priests were well-hidden and stood in relatively safe spots in the rear, while the Paladins were positioned directly behind the frontliners, ready to provide assistance at any time.

It appeared Sleepy Fox did have some skill in arranging his troops. The current formation was capable of dealing enormous amounts of damage.

"Are you confident we can succeed?" Nie Yan asked in a worried tone. Although the formation was formidable, in a direct confrontation, the end result would still be their defeat. Why was

he so sure that this formation would hold up against so many Manticores at once? Unless... maybe he had a hidden card of some sort? If so, Nie Yan was curious to see. After all, this was Holy Empire's elite team. How could they not have a few tricks up their sleeves?

Sleepy Fox gave a confident nod.

"Alright, I'll aggro them over," Nie Yan replied. He then drew closer to the den, with crossbow in hand, and found a suitable vantage point to shoot from.「Whoosh! Whoosh! Whoosh!」Several bolts fired from the crossbow. Two bolts struck trees at the far rear of the den, and a split second later, the third bolt landed on the Manticore closest to them.

The third bolt aggroed three Manticores over to Nie Yan while the rest of the pride was momentarily distracted by the sounds in the rear. However, after noticing three of their members charging in the opposite direction, they also stormed towards him.

"Not bad!" Sleepy Fox hardly held back on his praise. Nie Yan's movements were swift and agile, he had sharp senses, and he possessed techniques that were extremely unique and innovative.

Sleepy Fox inwardly schemed. If he were to offer, would Nie Yan be willing to join his guild? Once Nie Yan became his subordinate, he would definitely receive a prominent position in Holy Empire. However, after getting more familiar with him, he vaguely sensed Nie Yan wasn't the sort of person who would agree to lodge under another person's roof. In other words, Nie Yan probably preferred to lead instead of being led.

When Nie Yan returned, the three Manticores also followed.

“Violent Waves, block them!” Sleepy Fox ordered. Violent Waves Rampant Surge was the number one Fighter in Holy Empire, his role being the team’s main tank. In the previous timeline, he was also considered a remarkable player. However, he and the other outstanding members were mostly overshadowed by the brilliance of their guild leader. One had to know, when Sleepy Fox retrieved the Chapter of Courage, he had eventually reached the apex and obtained the entire Holy Viridian set. From then on, only a scarce few players were able to rival him. As a consequence, many of the outstanding members serving under him ended up being overlooked. However, without an elite team supporting him in the shadows, how could a player like Sleepy Fox grow to be so powerful?

Chapter 94 – Templar Magic

Violent Waves Rampant Surge stepped forward and intercepted one of the Manticores. He opened with Heroic Strike followed by Shield Bash. As soon as they witnessed their companion being attacked, the other two Manticores immediately switched targets and joined the fray. Against all three Manticores, Violent Waves raised his golden tower shield and firmly defended against their assault.

His movements were extremely nimble and adept, especially for a Fighter. However, if he didn't at least possess this little bit of skill, how could he have received the role of main tank in Holy Empire's elite team?

A line of damage values rose above Violent Waves as he endured the relentless onslaught of the Manticores. Soon, a gentle radiance enveloped him, replenishing a large portion of his missing health.

His health bar continued to fluctuate as the battle raged on. Though, ultimately, the Priests weren't able to keep pace as his health fell progressively lower. It appeared even Holy Empire's best Fighter wasn't able to endure against these fierce attacks.

The rest of the frontliners, which included Sleepy Fox, rushed forward and entered the battle in order to alleviate some of the pressure.

“Remember to use Anti-Paralysis Potions!”

“Understood!” Violent Waves replied.

Meanwhile, the Mages in the rear were emitting a brilliant radiance as magical energies coalesced. Some were still channeling high-level magic while others had already finished and were firing off their spells.「Bang! Bang! Bang!」Magic bombarded the Manticores and instantly obliterated the one they first engaged.

Nie Yan circled behind one of the two remaining Manticores and assailed it with Concussive Blow followed by Vital Strike.

-103

-123

“Holy shit! What kind of damage is that!?” Many of the team members felt their minds turn to mush. Were those really the attacks of a Thief? Why did they seem so much fiercer than some of the attacks of the Warriors in the team?

From their perspectives, Warriors naturally had the higher attack because Thieves accounted for it with high attack speed. This was common sense. So, when they saw Nie Yan deal so much damage, they were astonished.

While dual-wielding daggers, Nie Yan possessed both high attack speed and high damage. This combination was simply too overpowered!

「Thud! Thud!」With that, the remaining two Manticores collapsed on the ground. The entire team worked with quick efficiency, so even by Nie Yan's standards, he still had nothing to complain about.

After the first three Manticores were killed, the other thirteen had finally arrived.

All six frontliners, Sleepy Fox included, readied themselves to engage the Manticores. Directly behind them were the Paladins. Since they were a profession that wore plate armour, they could occasionally serve as frontliners as well. Moreover, Paladins with good equipment possessed defenses no lower than a Fighter's.

“Dammit, these Manticores deal a lot of damage. Violent Waves, try to hold off that Alpha Manticore,” Sleepy Fox ordered. As their guild leader, even he felt incredibly nervous when he saw Violent Waves' health continuously fall lower and lower. Needless to say, the other team members weren't faring much better.

The amount of damage these Manticores could dish out exceeded Sleepy Fox's expectations. Even though there had been just three of them, they were barely able to cope with it. Yet now, there were thirteen of them. Thankfully he placed their formation in a choke point; otherwise, if so many powerful Manticores were allowed to freely get to their backline, he imagined the consequences would be disastrous.

It was probably a bad idea to continue gauging a Specialist dungeon by using their experiences on Normal.

“Cold Maple, cast Scorching Meteor. Otherwise, it’ll be too late,” Sleepy Fox declared solemnly. The healers were under far too much pressure. Even the slightest mistake could lead to serious consequences. He didn’t dare to dally any longer. He had to play all of the cards in his hand.

Wait, what? Scorching Meteor? Templar Magic?

“Wai-!”

Nie Yan wanted to stop him, but it was too late. That Holy Mage called Cold Maple had already taken out a golden coloured talisman and begun chanting the spell.

Ahh, what a waste! Why would you use Templar Magic in this kind of place! Nie Yan felt quite annoyed. If he had known they had such a spell in their arsenal, he would’ve prevented them from using it until the boss. The King Manticore was the most dangerous when it reached critical health, so the burst damage of a spell like Scorching Meteor would’ve been perfect for such a situation. Not only would it have saved them much time and effort, it would have also prevented potential casualties. However, by now, it was too late. The spell had already begun channeling; even if it was cancelled, it would still go on cooldown.

Out of the many classifications of magic, there were over several that were considered the strongest. They comprised Humanity’s Templar Magic, Giant’s Kasate Magic, Beastmen’s Berserk Magic, Elves’ Lunar Spirit Magic, Demons’ Black Magic, Undead’s Fate

Magic, and a few others. Furthermore, there were also powerful magics just a tier lower such as Elemental Temple Magic, Undead Temple Magic, and so on. Each one possessed cultural and regional characteristics and was tied rather closely to the religion of the players.

There was no doubt that all of these magics were incredibly powerful.

Templar Magic was also divided into sixteen ranks.

Scorching Meteor was classified as the weakest rank one Templar Magic. Make no mistake, just because it was the weakest Templar Magic didn't mean it was actually weak. Among the spells available to the current playerbase, Scorching Meteor was an exceedingly formidable skill. Its cooldown was two days, and the requisites for casting it were notoriously harsh.

The spell required a Templar Talisman that needed to be prepared in advance, which meant inscribing and imbuing. It would take nearly an hour to inscribe a spell like Scorching Meteor onto a talisman. Then, for there to be sufficient energy to power the spell, the talisman needed to be imbued with mana. Even the most common rank one spells required at least a thousand or more mana points. In other words, for a player like Cold Maple, he would have to drain at least three bars worth of mana to cast the spell.

Moreover, after casting Scorching Meteor, the spell required two entire days for it to be cast again. So, it seemed quite obvious that this spell shouldn't be used rashly.

Naturally, Templar Magic wasn't easily obtainable. A single skill book could cost upwards of one gold or more. Moreover, just because someone had the money didn't mean it was necessarily purchasable.

Sleepy Fox had ordered Cold Maple to cast the spell. The main reason was because the situation seemed desperate, but the other reason was because he wanted to show Nie Yan his power and wealth.

After all, very few teams possessed spells as powerful as Templar Magic.

Under the ferocious assault of the Manticores, Sleepy Fox and the other frontliners were gradually being pushed back as they tried to buy as much time as possible.

Ten seconds. Twenty seconds. Thirty seconds. Scorching Meteor required three sets of syllables to invoke. Finally, the golden talisman in Cold Maple's hand emitted a dazzling brilliance, whereupon a giant, scorching sphere emerged in the sky and burst into countless white meteors that streaked toward the Manticores.

「Bang! Bang! Bang!」The meteors fell like rain as they battered the earth below.

-302, -321, -301, -310, -310... A stream of damage values rose into the sky. Each meteor blossomed into beautiful fireworks of light, resembling white lotuses as they bloomed into the open air.

After the third wave of meteors, almost all of the Manticores were killed. The only one remaining was the Alpha Manticore, but the meteors continued to fall. 「Bang! Bang! Bang!」After the fifth wave, even the Alpha Manticore was on its last legs.

The frontliners charged forward, and due to it being severely weakened, the Mages easily finished it off with another round of attacks.

Were it not for Scorching Meteor, they would have had a very tough time dealing with the Alpha Manticore. Perhaps without it, their team would have even been wiped out.

The area in front of them was littered with Manticore corpses. The several Thieves in the team walked over and began retrieving and sorting the dropped items.

“So, what do you think of that spell?” Sleepy Fox asked. He felt somewhat smug, but he didn’t reveal it in his expression. After all, he believed there was a chance Nie Yan hadn’t seen such a powerful spell before. He might have even broadened Nie Yan’s horizons.

Nie Yan forced out a smile. “Why did you have to use Templar Magic here. It’s simply too wasteful, don’t you think? If that had been your secret plan all along, what’s going to happen when we encounter the next den?”

Nie Yan wasn’t some newbie who just joined the game. His

experiences far exceeded Sleepy Fox's wildest imaginations, so he hadn't been the least bit surprised, much less impressed, by a rank one Templar Magic like Scorching Meteor.

In fact, he was incredibly vexed and disappointed. Sleepy Fox using Templar Magic here was complete overkill. By the time they encountered the next den, not only would they not have the spell as back up, they would be stuck with no way to advance!

Sleepy Fox felt slightly embarrassed after listening to Nie Yan's comments. If there were another way, he also wouldn't have been willing to use Templar Magic, but their previous situation had been dire. Furthermore, the other reason he decided to use the spell was because he wanted to impress Nie Yan. Unfortunately, he garnered the complete opposite reaction and criticism instead, with Nie Yan identifying the spell as Templar Magic with just a single glance. Not only that, but Nie Yan seemed to know much more than him. Just who in the world was this person?

Chapter 95 – Convinced

“But if we didn’t use Scorching Meteor, the team would have definitely been wiped. How else are we supposed to deal with so many Manticores at once?” Sleepy Fox asked. He didn’t quite believe Nie Yan could clear such a large den of Manticores without the use of large-scale magic.

“We could’ve cleared it without wasting Scorching Meteor, but my method requires an extremely skilled Thief,” Nie Yan replied. Since he dared to bring them into a Specialist dungeon, naturally, it meant he knew how to clear the dens. Spells like Scorching Meteor were only one-offs since they couldn’t be repeatedly cast during a run.

Sleepy Fox didn’t reply; instead, he stayed taciturn and sunk into deep thought. If Nie Yan really could clear such a large den of Manticores by relying solely on skill and this current group of players, wouldn’t that mean Nie Yan was more capable of leading the team than him, their captain and guild leader?

“Alright, then let’s try your way out,” conceded Sleepy Fox, finally breaking his silence. He wasn’t a narrow-minded person who only cared about his reputation. If there was someone more capable, he would readily submit. He admired those who possessed ability and talent. And in Holy Empire, players who were more talented than him in one aspect or another could be found everywhere, yet he still remained as the guild leader!

“Captain! A piece of Gold equipment dropped!” one of the members called out in a pleasantly surprised tone.

“What kind of equipment? Come here and show me,” Sleepy Fox replied.

Sleepy Fox, Nie Yan, and the others examined the piece of equipment. It belonged to the Priest’s Divine Blessing set.

“Don’t get too excited yet. Out of all the current dungeons, Agmota Muddy Wetlands on Specialist has the highest drop rate for top-quality equipment, so one dropping here isn’t all that strange. Just wait a bit, you’ll be seeing much more equipment of this quality or higher the further we get into the run,” Nie Yan said. He was quite accustomed to seeing equipment of this quality. After all, in comparison to Legendary equipment, they were no different from other ordinary drops.

As for how the team would decide who this piece of equipment went to had nothing to do with him, since by the end of the run, he would receive his promised share regardless.

Beside being knowledgeable and experienced, Sleepy Fox sensed Nie Yan was also quite self-reliant. These types of people were the most difficult to recruit as subordinates since they didn’t like being ordered around. It seemed roping Nie Yan into Holy Empire wasn’t going to be as easy as he initially thought.

Sleepy Fox gave the set item to one of the stronger Priests, and with that, they then set out for the next area.

Not much time passed before they encountered another den. This

one was roughly the same size as the one from earlier which contained seventeen Manticores.

Sleepy Fox turned Nie Yan and said, “Let’s see your method now.”

Nie Yan nodded and scanned the surrounding terrain for a suitable location. Under his command, he and the other Thieves in the team, numbered from one to three, set out to their specified positions.

These four soon arrived in their designated positions and took up a square formation. Then, Nie Yan proceeded to explain in detail what role each member would have.

The Manticores lazily roamed the area around their den, completely oblivious to the players who were lurking nearby and eying them like prey.

「Remember, don’t tangle with them. Run away as soon as you see them aggro onto you. Don’t dally either. They’re too fast for you. If you’re even a second too slow, you won’t be able to get away,」Nie Yan carefully reminded.

After listening to these instructions, Sleepy Fox suddenly had a flash of insight. It seemed Nie Yan planned on splitting the Manticores into more manageable groups. The only problem was the other Thieves in the team were simply too slow. Pulling these Manticores exceeded their abilities.

Although these Thieves were able to evade the Manticores for a period of time, they definitely couldn't do it forever, and even then, it wouldn't be for that long. Eventually, they would get overtaken, and then they would be screwed.

When the other Thieves finished their preparations, Nie Yan announced through the intercom,「Once we begin, don't stray from my commands.」

The three Thieves were completely focused. All of them took a deep breath when they saw Nie Yan take out his crossbow and aim at the Alpha Manticore.

Eh...? They're not all attacking together? Sleepy Fox was a bit taken by surprise.

As Nie Yan peered through the sight, he lined up the target and fired.「Whoosh! Whoosh! Whoosh!」Three bolts flew through the air before striking the Alpha Manticore. Immediately, after being attacked, the Manticore discovered the location of its assailant. It roared in indignation then pounced toward him.

The numerous common Manticores also followed closely from behind. Upon seeing this, Nie Yan turned tail and fled.

He actually dared to take on all the aggro by himself? How courageous, Sleepy Fox thought. If Nie Yan didn't have complete confidence in his ability, there was no way he would even attempt to take on such a difficult task that was tantamount to throwing his life away.

「Number Three, attack the three Manticores at the rear!」Nie Yan yelled through the intercom. Number Three didn't dare to idle any longer and immediately drew the string back on his short bow and shot out three arrows.「Whoosh! Whoosh! Whoosh!」The arrows whistled in the air and hit their respective targets, one manticore each.

Upon being attacked, the three Manticores in the rear diverted their aggro, separated from the group, and began pursuing the Thief with the short bow instead.

The Thief hastily retreated to the forces waiting at the sidelines and pulled the Manticores along with him.

Nie Yan was madly dashing through the bog, inwardly counting the seconds as they passed. Three... Two... One...「Number Two, go for the next three!」

Number Two didn't delay and shot three arrows at the three rearmost Manticores. Thus, another three were peeled off from the main group.

Since the Thieves would only pull three at a time, the frontliners didn't feel too much pressure and were able to easily hold them off. Therefore, the Mages could freely fire their spells, requiring only three rounds to kill the Manticores.

Nie Yan ran like the wind as he continuously evaded the pursuit of the Manticores. Thanks to his speed and agility making him as

slippery as a loach, their attacks would always fail to hit their target. It appeared even if they were given all the time in the world, these Manticores still wouldn't be able to touch a single hair on his head.

While Nie Yan was distracting the main group, the three Thieves took turns in aggroing a few Manticores at a time. As they pulled three Manticores off of the main group with each rotation, they gradually shaved down what was once a formidable pride.

Spells fell like rain as the Manticores dropped like flies. Nie Yan's method was undoubtedly a success. However, it could only be accomplished by a Thief with excellent fleeing abilities and spatial awareness. If someone else were to attempt this strategy, they definitely wouldn't have the ability to pull it off and would only end up as food for the Manticores.

"Damn, he's really fast!" Sleepy Fox couldn't help but exclaim. He watched as Nie Yan made fools out of these Manticores while running circles around them.

"Guild Leader, who the hell is this guy!?"

The members in the team couldn't help but wonder. Just where did their guild leader find such an obscenely overpowered Thief?

"Shut up! Stop slacking!" Sleepy Fox shouted.

The chattering immediately stopped, and they immediately

focused their attention back onto the incoming Manticores, not daring to utter a single additional word. After several rounds, another wave was annihilated.

“Shit! I’m out of mana.”

“Use a Mana Potion!”

On the third wave, Sleepy Fox was shocked to discover that each time they had finished one wave, another Thief would arrive with three Manticores in tow. In neither a slow nor rushed pace, the next wave would always arrive in a timely manner.

Sleepy Fox was left speechless by Nie Yan’s impeccable timing.

None of the players here were fools. They all understood how challenging of a task it was to evade such a large group of Manticores. Their hearts were only filled with admiration, and they no longer dared to look down on him like they did when he arrived.

Initially, none of the members were convinced Nie Yan would be able to guide them through Agmota Muddy Wetlands. Now, however, they were convinced of his ability.

Chapter 96 – King Manticore

Speaking truthfully, the pressure Nie Yan felt while evading these Manticores was immense, but such actions were required for the sake of convincing the team of his ability, which was also why he refrained from using the items he purchased beforehand.

The Alpha Manticore was much faster than its brethren. So despite the use of a Haste Scroll, it eventually closed the distance and leaped forward.

As it pounced toward him, baring its fangs and claws, Nie Yan suddenly dodge rolled the fatal attack that was mere inches from taking off his head.

A bright blue light trailed behind the Alpha Manticore as it swiped only thin air. In spite of its quick attack speed, Nie Yan had avoided the attack in a timely manner, resulting in its massive frame barrelling past him.

Nie Yan quickly recovered from the roll and fled in a different direction.

This bold display of skill, where he was merely an inch away from death, left the onlookers endlessly shocked and excited. Nie Yan was truly a fearless person for daring to perform such a risky maneuver.

Upon landing, the Alpha Manticore veered its body and then continued after Nie Yan.

In order to keep buying more time for the rest of the team, Nie Yan deliberately ran in a zigzag pattern.

Every six to eight seconds, the three rearmost Manticores pursuing Nie Yan would be peeled from the main group. The formidable group of Manticores gradually dwindled until only the Alpha Manticore and an ordinary Manticore remained.

If not for the team members being there to personally witness it themselves, they would never believe a single Thief could be capable of evading such a large pride of Manticores for so long, especially one with an Alpha Manticore leading the chase.

At this moment, no member in Sleepy Fox's team dared to call his ability into question. They finally understood their captain taking the time to invite Nie Yan and even conceding leadership of the run to him wasn't without reason!

A player of Nie Yan caliber was definitely deserving of such consideration!

Despite there being no real evidence, Sleepy Fox surmised Nie Yan was quite possibly a member of a powerful team that must have already beaten Agmota Muddy Wetlands on Specialist difficulty before; otherwise, Nie Yan wouldn't be so familiar with luring such a large pride of Manticores. Assuming this conjecture was true, didn't that signify the strength of Nie Yan's team had already reached a terrifying level?

With each and every revelation, Nie Yan's origins were becoming more and more mysterious.

Never in his wildest dreams would he think that Nie Yan was actually someone who had reincarnated into the past. Nie Yan did indeed beat Agmota Muddy Wetlands on Specialist difficulty, but that was in the previous timeline where walkthroughs for all low-level dungeons were widespread and publicly available. By then, the number of teams that had cleared the Specialist dungeons were as numerous as the grains of sand on a beach shore.

As Sleepy Fox pondered over this matter, he saw Nie Yan leading the remaining Manticores over to them.

“Everyone, get ready for battle!” Sleepy Fox hurriedly announced. The Leader-class Manticore was still going to be rather difficult to deal with.

Violent Waves raised his shield and ran over to intercept the Alpha Manticore.

Though, before he could reach Nie Yan, the Alpha Manticore suddenly pounced.

“Watch out!” several people cried out in alarm.

Seeing as Nie Yan about to be killed, many members couldn't bear to watch any longer. It appeared, even after persisting for long, he was still going to fall at the final stretch.

In that instant, as if he had grown eyes at the back of his head, Nie Yan suddenly pivoted his foot and dodged to the side.

The abrupt change in direction resulted in the Alpha Manticore's claw harmlessly brushing past him.

Sleepy Fox and a few other who witnessed the scene all broke out into a cold sweat. The attack had missed by just the tiniest fraction of an inch. However, it was this small gap—this line of demarcation—that represented the pinnacle of skill.

Unlike the others, Nie Yan wore an expression of complete calm on his face despite having been just a hair's breadth away from death; he acted as if such a haggaring situation was merely an everyday occurrence.

“Shield Bash!” Violent Waves rammed his shield into the Alpha Manticore and helped take aggro off of Nie Yan. Following immediately after were the numerous spells arriving from the rear line.「Bang! Bang! Bang!」They bombarded the Alpha Manticore's body as damage values rose above its head.

Meanwhile, another Fighter charged ahead and took the aggro of the other Manticore, assuring it wouldn't attack anyone else.

During all this, Nie Yan circled behind the Alpha Manticore and unleashed a chain of attacks.

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The damage Nie Yan dealt was quite considerable, causing the Alpha Manticore's aggro to switch back to him. However, a moment later, Violent Waves let out an ear piercing roar that carried an intimidating force.

Demoralizing Shout!

The shout resulted in the Alpha Manticore immediately halting its movements. Then, in response, it turned back to Violent Waves and furiously started attacking him once more.

Demoralizing Shout was able to intimidate a monster for several seconds and interrupt their attack. At the same time, it was also able to attract aggro. This was the bread-and-butter within the toolkit Fighters had at their disposal to pull monsters.

Since the Alpha Manticore had become isolated, the battle was much easier and ended without much suspense. Under the constant barrage of spells, the Alpha Manticore was quickly, and simply, blasted into smithereens.

After collapsing onto the ground, the Alpha Manticore dropped a piece of a Silver equipment for Paladins.

Unfortunately, in a Specialist dungeon, getting a Silver equipment drop seemed a bit lackluster.

They really could clear an entire Manticore den without the need for Scorching Meteor. Completely amazed at this fact, Sleep Fox was now thoroughly convinced Nie Yan's skills were beyond exceptional. He was an incredibly talented player. Sleepy Fox really wanted to recruit him into the guild and even offered very generous conditions, but he was tactfully refused. Now, since it appeared Nie Yan becoming his subordinate was unrealistic, he decided the next best plan was to maintain a friendly relationship.

Afterward, the team proceeded to clear over a dozen dens of similar size. Sleepy Fox was the first to reach Level 7 while the other members followed in succession. Seeing everyone else level up, Nie Yan glanced at his experience bar. He was still thirty-five percent away from levelling up, so he wasn't far off either. During this period of time, where they cleared den after den, Sleepy Fox and his team acquired many good pieces of equipment. Among them was a pair of Thief Gold-grade leg guards: Strength +10, Balance +6. It could be considered decent and was better than the ones he had currently equipped, so Nie Yan directly took it. With the events that had transpired, the other Thieves in the team no longer had the courage to quibble with Nie Yan over it either. Regardless, by the end, the entire team had upgraded their gear in one way or another.

Nie Yan calculated in his head. From this run alone, he would receive at least ten or so silvers. Although it wasn't much, it was still better than nothing.

Continuously employing the same tactics, Nie Yan and the team gradually approached the King Manticore's den which was located at the center of the marsh. It was wide open space with many Manticores roaming around with roughly sixty to seven of them. If one looked into the distance, over a hundred meters away, they would catch sight of a gigantic, golden-maned Manticore wandering about. It was many times larger and significantly more muscular than the other Manticores around it. This was the one and only King Manticore.

"If only we had Scorching Meteor for this boss..." Sleepy Fox mumbled in embarrassment. He couldn't help but feel regret over wasting it in such a rash manner so early in the run.

"No worries, the area here is big enough that we can lure the Manticores without attracting the attention of the others. The only difficult part is actually killing the King Manticore. It's Lord-class," Nie Yan said. The boss' Easy and Normal difficulty counterparts were Sub-Elites while the Hard and Expert ones were Elites. Only in Specialist would the players have to confront the Lord variant of the boss.

Although the Specialist counterpart was rather difficult to beat, the quality of the drops scaled accordingly with the increase in difficulty. Naturally, the kind of equipment that could be retrieved from this boss was on an entirely different level than ones from its lower difficulty counterparts. At the very least, an item of Gold-grade would drop, and occasionally, a Dark-Gold item would drop as well. Besides equipment, the boss also frequently dropped special items such as gems, special crafting materials, and unique consumables.

Chapter 97 – Fog And Lighthouse

“Still, if it weren’t for your help, we would’ve never made it here,” Sleepy Fox said.

During the journey, many members started to view Nie Yan in a different light. Their gazes were still filled with a complicated emotion, but more than anything, they were feeling deep admiration. Now, they heeded his every word with almost absolute faith. His leadership had borne excellent results.

The fact he was able to bring them to this point alone was already ample proof of his ability to command.

People like Nie Yan were destined to become legends.

“Brother Nie, are you absolutely certain you don’t wish to join our guild? Even among the other guilds, our Holy Empire is ranked quite highly. If Brother Nie is willing to join, then our treatment would be just as good as, if not better than, the other guilds’. If that still isn’t enticing enough, then how about you enter our guild as an honorary member for now? You won’t even be obligated to do anything. All we’ll ask is that you keep in contact with us.” Sleepy Fox tried throwing out another one of his recruiting pitches. Nie Yan didn’t bear any sort of emblem on his body, which meant he shouldn’t be a member of any guild. This was rare for a player as skilled as Nie Yan, so he wasn’t willing to give up just yet.

“That won’t be necessary,” Nie Yan lightly chuckled as he politely declined the offer. He understood that Sleepy Fox was

simply trying to rope him into becoming involved with the guild. Once he was an honorary member, Sleepy Fox would gradually attempt to change his mind until he became a full-fledged member of Holy Empire. Although honorary membership would grant him many benefits, he knew there was no such thing as a free lunch in this world. He didn't want to spend his time being a dog for some guild.

“Eh... Alright, then so be it,” Sleepy Fox replied, clearly disappointed.

“However, if any opportunities arise in the future, we should look to cooperate again,” Nie Yan added. This virtual world would birth countless legends of financial windfalls. More than just being a second world in name, this game turning into one would become a reality. It would be viewed by numerous figures as a new land of growth and opportunity. In his previous life, when Cao Xu was at the peak of his power, he had five large guilds at his beck and call and owned various businesses spread across Calore, Nisode, and Radiant City. Not only that, but the industries under his control were quite diverse as well, covering over ten different markets. As a result, his assets in the virtual world were valued in the hundreds of billions. Nie Yan needed to become more powerful than Cao Xu, powerful enough to thoroughly crush him. He needed to become so powerful that Cao Xu would be forced to think twice before acting against him. Only then would his mind be at ease. Nie Yan wouldn't allow the events of his past life to repeat themselves in this one. This, however, was impossible to achieve alone, which was why he needed to gradually build up a network of reliable contacts. The person who currently stood before him, Sleepy Fox, was one such person who was worthy of developing a relationship with.

“Of course, I’d be glad to.” Sleepy Fox believed Nie Yan was merely talking about running another dungeon together. Never did Sleepy Fox consider that he might’ve actually meant something else.

However, Nie Yan didn’t bother expanding upon this any further and instead turned his attention back to hunting down the Manticores.

“Seven Nights, I want you to expand our coverage by scouting out the southeast. Be wary of the traps, especially the quagmires,” Nie Yan said. Seven Nights Showstopper was the weakest Thief on the team, a handsome young man who had just turned twenty. Currently he didn’t amount to much in Sleepy Fox’s eyes, but his talent and potential weren’t bad. According to Nie Yan’s past life, this man was to mature into the guild’s number one Thief in the future. Though Seven Nights was very quiet and reserved, which made it hard to gauge his thoughts, he had a gentle personality, so Nie Yan had a good impression of him. Because of this, Nie Yan had subconsciously favoured Seven Nights a bit more than the other Thieves when issuing orders.

“Alright,” replied Seven Nights. It was finally his turn to show off. After receiving Nie Yan’s order, he quickly dashed toward the southeast without feeling even the slightest bit of hesitation.

As someone who played the same profession, Seven Nights felt nothing but admiration for Nie Yan, even to the point of prostrating before him. What made him extremely happy was the fact that Nie Yan treated him quite politely despite not paying any attention to his companions, the other two Thieves in the team.

Once he began his designated task of scouting the southeast, a thought popped up in his head. When this run was over, he would definitely make sure to ask Nie Yan for some advice on playing a Thief.

Nie Yan was completely unaware this slight discrepancy in treatment had birthed great waves in Seven Nights' heart.

Why scout the southeast? Sleepy Fox thought to himself, slightly puzzled. Logically speaking, since the King Manticore was right in front of them, shouldn't they just directly head for it instead of creating extra work for themselves by scouting the southeast?

"You'll find out why in a bit," Nie Yan said, as if he knew what Sleepy Fox was thinking.

Several minutes later, Seven Nights spoke through the team intercom.「I discovered an old light house, but there are a few Manticores guarding the area around the entrance!」

「Good, climb the lighthouse and turn on the light at the very top. Use Stealth to circle to the back and enter through the entrance there. Make sure those Manticores don't detect you!」Nie Yan ordered. Seven Nights was quite fast, and with his skills, avoiding those Manticores shouldn't pose much of a challenge.

Then, after another several minutes, a shabby lighthouse in the distance began emitting a little light.

The light grew increasingly brighter until its radiance became so intense that it penetrated the dark fog of the marsh and arrived at Nie Yan and the team's location.

Under the illumination of the lighthouse, the dark fog that shrouded the Agmota Muddy Wetlands surprisingly dispersed.

The dark fog that once stifled everyone's mood had mostly cleared out right away.

Sleepy Fox finally understood. This lighthouse was quite possibly the essential factor required in order to beat the King Manticore!

「You did well!」Sleepy Fox praised Seven Nights.

Upon hearing this, Seven Nights felt quite happy since their captain rarely praised his subordinates, but he was also fairly pleased because Nie Yan had given him the chance to display his skills!

“Alright, since the lighthouse is lit, let's proceed to the next step. There are three Elite-class Manticores roaming the area near the King Manticore. We'll have to draw them out one at a time and then eliminate them,” Nie Yan explained. This was one of the more difficult steps in clearing the dungeon on Specialist. It required a lot from the players, but he had a simple solution.

Sleepy Fox felt as if his heart had skipped a beat. One had to know, even on Hard and Expert, only the final boss was an Elite.

Yet, on Specialist, not only did they have to deal with the King Manticore, a Lord-class monster, they had to contend with three Elite Manticores as well!

It could be seen rather clearly just how difficult dungeons on Specialist were. Thinking about what they were about to face, Sleepy Fox felt somewhat nervous and apprehensive. Even if they were able to kill the three Elite Manticores, with what could be lying in wait for them, would it really be possible for them to beat the final boss?

The only thing that was of some comfort was the fact that, despite this being a dungeon on Specialist, they had still been able to arrive at this point. Even if they wiped here, the number of items and pieces of equipment they had obtained so far would be able to make up for their losses. Since their losses were no longer an issue, they could commit everything to the final battle without fear.

The entire team shared this resolve.

So with this attitude, many of the members were prepared to go all out!

These three Elite Manticores were the queens of this entire pride, so their strength also couldn't be looked down upon.

Nie Yan and company proceeded to clear the area of all the common Manticores. Afterward, the only monsters that remained were the three Elite Manticores and the King Manticore. The only

problem was that they were fairly close to one another. In this wide open patch of dry land in the center of the marsh, they would occasionally roam around in a leisurely manner, and at other times, they would lay on their stomachs and briefly rest.

Everyone in the team was currently sitting down and resting under the cover of shrubbery. They were replenishing their health and mana. Only after they all fully recovered would they dare to finally engage one of the Elite-class Manticores.

During this time period, Nie Yan was the only one who wasn't recovering with the others. He was actually searching for a suitable spot.

Chapter 98 – Repel Evil

Nie Yan peered through his crossbow sight from behind the brush he was using for cover. After a short while, he lowered his gaze and shook his head. This place won't do either... With such thoughts in mind, he got up and moved to another area, only to repeat the same actions and move on yet again.

“What do you think he's doing?” Dusk asked, flabbergasted, as he observed Nie Yan busily moving from one area to another. It was still too early to be aggroing the Elites, wasn't it?

“Well, he shouldn't be looking for a vantage point, that's for sure. He hasn't been within firing range this entire time,” Sleepy Fox replied. He was also rather curious as to what Nie Yan was up to.

After all, it was impossible for a crossbow to hit from this far away!

Nie Yan walked behind a tree and began gauging the distance. This should do! Finding a suitable spot, he raised his crossbow and fired in the direction of one of the Elite Manticores.

「Whoosh! Whoosh! Whoosh!」Three bolts flew out in succession.

Sleepy Fox was taken aback. Wait, are you really aggroing them? Isn't it still too early? We haven't even fully recovered yet! However, he suddenly recalled. Wait, that's not right. They're still out of his attack range.

As expected, the bolts gradually lost momentum and slowly dropped until they eventually hit the ground.

They had fallen just ten meters short of the closest Elite Manticore and thirteen away from the next closest.

An Elite Manticore's detection range extended out to ten meters.

This knowledge was the result of compiling the numerous experiences of players who had run Agmota Muddy Wetlands on Specialist in Nie Yan's past life.

Nie Yan just so happened to know of a little trick that made use of this information, and with his skills, he could easily pull it off even with his hands tied behind his back.

Out of the three Elite Manticores roaming around, only the closest one heard the sound of the bolts hitting the ground. Thus, it was also the only one that moved towards the source with the intent of investigating. After walking two or three meters, it stopped in place and began scanning the surrounding area, yet it wasn't able to find anything, so it turned around and began to head back

「Whoosh! Whoosh! Whoosh!」Before it could take even a single step back, however, Nie Yan fired off another round of bolts which landed just ten meters away from the Elite Manticore yet again. The Manticore halted and resumed its search for the source of the sound, but it still couldn't find anything. Then, just when it was

about to head back, another sound came from an area ten more meters away.

Nie Yan repeated this action several more times. Whenever the Elite Manticore was about to turn and leave, he would send three more bolts to a spot just barely within its detection range. Meanwhile, Nie Yan did his best to avoid being spotted by the Manticore as he attracted its interest with crossbow bolts.

In this fashion, the Elite Manticore was continuously drawn away all by its lonesome self. The distance between itself and the other Manticores was growing increasingly wider with every repetition.

Sleepy Fox and the other members were shocked as they watched this scene unfold before their very eyes. Never did they expect that Nie Yan would use such a method to draw out the Elite Manticore.

If they continued like this, then it might actually be possible to kill the Elite Manticores and the King Manticore individually, one after another.

This method was something they could've never come up with on their own. Furthermore, it wasn't a tactic that just anyone could employ either. Nie Yan's timing and accuracy were both simply impeccable.

"Everyone, get into position. Since Brother Nie has revealed his skills, we mustn't show any weaknesses either, unless you want others to look down on us. Remember, you're the handpicked elite

of Holy Empire. Show some vigour! Who knows, perhaps today we really will be able to beat Agmota Muddy Wetlands on Specialist!" Sleepy Fox stood tall and puffed up his chest. Seeing their captain stand up, the other members all followed suit, standing up one after another. Their eyes blazed with determination as they followed Sleepy Fox's orders and began getting into formation.

The final hurdle was to clear these three Elite Manticores and the Lord-class King Manticore, a hurdle so insurmountable that even Sleepy Fox originally felt they had no hope of succeeding. However, who would have thought that Nie Yan randomly moving about would actually cause such an utterly drastic change in their circumstances.

Perhaps they really would be able to clear this dungeon!

After being drawn out by Nie Yan, the lone Elite Manticore was well over twenty meters away from its companions.

Nie Yan raised his crossbow and took aim once more.「Whoosh! Whoosh! Whoosh!」Three bolts flew out once again, but this time they actually hit the Elite Manticore.

Upon being struck, the Elite Manticore immediately discovered Nie Yan's presence. The attack had enraged it, and after letting out a low growl, it pounced toward its aggressor.

With that, Nie Yan turned around and fled towards the rest of the team.

“Everyone, prepare for battle!” Just as Nie Yan spoke, he discovered Sleepy Fox and company were already in formation.

Violent Waves raised his tower shield, charged forth, struck the Elite Manticore with Heroic Strike, and then followed with Taunt in order to completely grab its aggro. Afterwards, he retreated back, raised his shield, and moved into a defensive stance.

Now, the Elite Manticore’s aggro was fully on Violent Waves. It raised its paw and furiously swiped at his shield with a force so tremendous that he was knocked back several steps.

-123 A damage value floated above his head.

Such terrifying damage!

Violent Waves only had three hundred or so health. If the Manticore managed to land a critical hit, then he’d be in immediate peril.

“Paladins, cast Repel Evil on Violent Waves!” Nie Yan yelled. The Elite Manticore’s claws were strengthened with a sinister magic that made their attacks deal enormous damage.

Shortly after Nie Yan made the order, a shallow blue light enshrouded Violent Waves. Immediately, the damage he was receiving from the attacks fell by thirty percent.

Only then did Sleepy Fox and the others discover that a Paladin’s

Repel Evil was effective at reducing the Elite Manticore's damage. The effect was even better than the Barrier spell. Furthermore, Barrier could only absorb so much damage before breaking. Under the Elite Manticore's attacks, it would've shattered almost instantly. However, Repel Evil would last for ten seconds regardless of the damage it reduced. After the ten seconds were over, a different Paladin could cast another Repel Evil. No wonder Nie Yan wanted to have at least three Paladins with Repel Evil in the team. It was because three Paladins would mean Repel Evil would have a hundred percent uptime on the main tank as long as they took turns and cast it immediately after the previous one expired.

With a significant portion of the damage being negated, the whole fight progressed in an orderly manner. Violent Waves was able to easily tank the Elite Manticore's attacks while the Mages at the rear gradually chipped away at its health.

The Elite Manticore opened its mouth and spewed a poisonous green mist in Violent Wave's face.

Violent Waves, who was firmly blocking the Elite Manticore's attacks, suddenly found himself deprived of his vision, causing him to fumble and lose sight of his target. However, this didn't last more than a moment, and he was soon able to see clearly again. This was thanks to a Priest who had cast Remove Blind in a timely manner. Having regained his vision, Violent Waves immediately discovered that the Elite Manticore was about to switch its aggro to someone else. If someone else were to pull aggro, the Elite Manticore would proceed to wreak havoc on the backline which would most likely end up killing many of the Mages.

Demoralizing Shout!

Violent Waves' use of Demoralizing Shout intimidated the Elite Manticore, forcing it to retreat several steps. After waiting to be healed some more, he charged forward and struck it with Shield Bash, pulling the Elite Manticore's aggro back onto him. He felt a cold sweat run down his forehead. If he had to wait even a second longer for the Priest to cast Remove Blind, then the team would've most likely been wiped.

Nie Yan's leadership gave rise to extremely important results.

All of the frontliners tightly surrounded the Elite Manticore and let loose every attack skill they had. Nie Yan also circled behind it and unleashed a flurry of skills.

The sound of explosions endlessly rang out as the Elite Manticore was bombarded with spells, sending damage values rising up into the air one after another.

When the Elite Manticore's health fell below five percent, its fur transformed into a bright red that dazzled the eyes.

It was about to go berserk!

Chapter 99 – Flash Powder

“Shadow Priest, root him in place now!”

Immobilize!

The Elite Manticore’s movements suddenly halted as it froze in place for a brief moment.

Immobilize lasted for no more than a second, but its effects were quite obvious.

Magic rained down on the Elite Manticore as its health fell to three percent. When it entered a berserk state, its attack power increased threefold. Being the one who had to deal with this increase, Violent Waves felt immense pressure as he tried his best to endure its assault while the Priests cast Lesser Heal with reckless abandon as they struggled just to keep him alive.

Noticing the situation turn dire, Nie Yan flicked his wrist as a pouch of Flash Powder emerged in his hand and then lobbed it at the Elite Manticore.

「Poof!」The pouch exploded and scattered white powder into the air. This fine powder was akin to thousands of tiny needles as it released a blinding radiance that pierced into the Elite Manticore’s eyes.

The members of the team were also affected by the Flash Powder,

but to a much lesser extent unlike the Elite Manticore that had lost all vision.

The pouch of powder was something Nie Yan had purchased prior from Trembling Milo. This item was able to release an intense flash of light that could momentarily blind the enemy for several seconds. The player could then take advantage of this time by either fleeing or attacking their opponent. Although the item cost a pretty penny, it was nevertheless extremely useful.

“Keep attacking, don’t slow down!” Nie Yan yelled.

The team had been taken aback and confused by the sudden burst of light. However, they soon regained their wits when they realized Nie Yan was the one who caused it. The enemy was completely blinded and helpless to retaliate, so they were able to freely let loose an even more ferocious barrage of magic and attacks at the Elite Manticore.

After a final round of spells, the Elite Manticore uttered one last, mournful roar before collapsing to the ground.

It wasn’t reasonable to say the Elite Manticore was the most dangerous when its health fell below five percent, but due to the crowd control effects of the Flash Powder and Immobilize, it was basically rendered harmless, allowing it to be easily slain.

On the other hand, under normal circumstances, an encounter with an Elite Manticore definitely wouldn’t have ended so pleasantly!

“What sort of item dropped?” Nie Yan asked Sleepy Fox.

Sleepy Fox walked over to the Elite Manticore’s corpse and picked up the dropped item. It was a Thief’s dagger, and not only that, it was Dark Gold-grade as well.

Blood Pact (Dark Gold)

Requirement: Level 0

Properties: Attack 23–26, Dexterity +11, Critical +12, Lifesteal 3%

Attack Speed: 2.3

Weight: 3 lb

User Restriction: Thief, can be equipped by all factions.

“It’s a Thief’s dagger!” Sleepy Fox shared the dagger’s information with Nie Yan.

As soon as the information window popped up, Nie Yan examined the dagger. Its properties weren’t bad for a Level 0 weapon, and the attack was only slightly lower than his Level 5 Gold dagger, [Assassin’s Decree](#). Furthermore, the additional lifesteal and critical rate placed it a bit higher than Assassin’s Decree overall and much higher than his [Horn Dagger](#)!

I can finally switch out my dagger!

This Blood Pact that they found in Agmota Muddy Wetlands on Specialist was probably one of the best Level 0 daggers possible.

“I want this dagger,” said Nie Yan as he stared at Sleepy Fox.

When such an amazing dagger appeared, all of the Thieves in the team gazed at it covetously. Of course, from the moment Nie Yan opened his mouth, they knew it would be impossible for them to obtain it, but speaking truthfully, this wasn't all too surprising. There was no way Nie Yan would be willing to pass on a weapon like Blood Pact.

Sleepy Fox didn't bicker and willingly handed Blood Pact over. After all, Nie Yan had been the one guiding them through this Specialist dungeon this whole time. If it weren't for him, they would have never been able to reach this point. Yet, besides a pair of leg guards, Nie Yan had never taken anything else up until now, which left Sleepy Fox feeling slightly embarrassed. Taking all this into consideration, naturally, this Dark Gold dagger would go to Nie Yan.

Upon receiving the item, Nie Yan promptly replaced the Horn Dagger in his hand with Blood Pact which in turn improved his damage significantly. Furthermore, he estimated that he would be able to farm the complete Black Blood set in the next few days. When that time came around, his gear would be upgraded another level.

By utilizing the same tactic, Nie Yan lured the other two Elite Manticores to the team one after another where they were swiftly dealt with. Two decent pieces of equipment dropped from their corpses as well. However, Nie Yan voluntarily passed on them since they weren't Thief items.

“Oh right! What were those pouches you threw at the Elite Manticore’s eyes?” Sleepy Fox couldn’t hold back his curiosity any longer and finally asked.

This question also prompted Dusk, Flying Stone, and the rest of the team members to turn their attention to Nie Yan as well. That strange pouch really was a useful item. Blinding an enemy in the middle of combat could achieve amazing results, especially during crucial moments,

“Flash Powder, it’s a special item, but it’s only effective against enemies Level 10 or lower.”

“Do you have anymore remaining?”

“In fact, I actually do, but I only have nine pouches left,” Nie Yan replied after pondering for a brief moment. Since Sleepy Fox and his team had already seen the item, he felt there was no harm in revealing it to them.

“Is this item really rare? I’ll buy two pouches for a silver each. How does that sound?” Sleepy Fox offered. Whether it was used against other players or against monsters, this queer item would likely show surprisingly good results. Hence, even if he bought them for a silver each, he still didn’t consider it very expensive.

Nie Yan’s eyes brightened after hearing these words. Given that Sleepy Fox was really willing to purchase the Flash Powder for one silver per pouch, then it was certain even more players would be

willing to pay a high price as well. Trembling Milo was a hidden NPC, and at present, no other players had yet to discover him. If he were to return to the shop and purchase a large quantity of Flash Powder, Web Scrolls, and Sheep Transformation Scrolls and then sell them on the marketplace, he would undoubtedly earn a fortune!

At least until the average playerbase surpassed Level 10, items like the ones found in Trembling Milo's House would all be extremely useful.

"How about we put this off until later? Let's clear the dungeon first," Nie Yan replied. Once they were out of the dungeon, he could list some of these items for sale and observe how the market would react.

"Alright, if you have any extra in storage, please sell a bit more to me," Sleepy Fox said. For a guild as large as his, spending a few silvers wasn't really a problem. Besides, after witnessing Flash Powder's effects in person, he really wanted to get his hands on some for himself.

Now the only monster that remained was the boss. Whether they cleared the quest, which involved saving the mayor, would also be determined by the outcome of this final battle.

Calling this King Manticore much stronger than its Easy and Normal counterparts would be a gross understatement. So as the team prepared to face off against this behemoth of a boss, many of the members, as well as Sleepy Fox, were filled with fear and apprehension.

This would be their first encounter with a Lord-class monster that was actually within their level range!

With this thought running through their minds, the surrounding team members were all somewhat tense. Although they had been able to miraculously reach this point due to Nie Yan's leadership, when facing against absolute strength, they couldn't help but feel a sense of dread.

“Paladins, be ready to cast Repel Evil once the duration times out. Priests, constantly take note of Violent Waves' health while managing your mana properly as well. When facing the King Manticore, there are certain to be casualties. Other players can die, but the only member on this team who absolutely cannot die is Violent Waves! If he ends up dead, the entire team will also end up wiping. Therefore, I want the Priests to only focus their healing on Violent Waves. Other frontliners, if your health gets low, immediately disengage from the battle because no Priests will be able to heal you. You're only going to be able to heal yourselves once you're out of combat. Shadow Priest, hold onto your Immobilize. I'll tell you to cast it when the time arrives.” Having reached this point, Nie Yan began gradually informing everyone of their individual roles in the battle.

All of the team members committed their full attention, not daring to overlook even a single detail.

“As for the minor things, I've explained those as well. In the end, the King Manticore is simply like that, so there's nothing for you all to get so nervous over,” Nie Yan said in a casual tone.

After hearing such a statement, Sleepy Fox, Dusk, Flying Stone, and all the other team members looked at each other and forced out a smile. Perhaps the only player in the game who could utter such words was Nie Yan. One had to know, the boss in front of them was a genuine Lord-class Monster!

Chapter 100 – Adapting To Unforeseen Circumstances

Nie Yan scanned his surroundings. Eventually, his eyes came across a nearby area that was flourishing with shrubbery, a place most suitable for facing the King Manticore. As such, he ordered the members of his team to set up their formation over there.

“Everyone ready? If so, then I’m going to pull,” asked Nie Yan as he turned to face his team.

“We’re good to go.”

Nie Yan raised his Crossbow of Blood and took aim at the King Manticore.「Whoosh! Whoosh! Whoosh! 」Three bolts flew through the air and directly struck the boss.

The King Manticore discovered Nie Yan nigh instantly and pounced toward him with incredible speed.

Seeing this, Nie Yan hastily dashed toward the location of his team, continuously firing off his crossbow as he fled.

The King Manticore increased its speed, steadily closing the gap between it and Nie Yan.

Nie Yan only needed to take a single glance at the fearsome beast pursuing him from behind to understand that whoever was

unlucky enough to suffer one of its attacks would undoubtedly die. Even Violent Waves wouldn't be able to endure repeated strikes from the King Manticore. If it could build up enough momentum during its charge, then even a Fighter with five hundred health and a hundred and fifty defense would be easily dispatched with a single swipe of its paw.

Violent Waves hadn't the slightest idea of just how dangerous the King Manticore was right now. He raised his shield and came forward with the intent of intercepting the beast after Nie Yan passed by.

When it was just thirty meters away, Nie Yan brought out a Sheep Transformation Scroll and bit his thumb, then used the blood to activate the magic dwelling inside.

A strange magical energy spilled out of the scroll and into the surrounding area.

By now, the distance between the King Manticore and Nie Yan had shortened to just twenty meters.

Once the Sheep Transformation Scroll's channeling time of two seconds was up, the scroll suddenly emitted a dazzling radiance as countless magical runes flew out into the sky and began revolving in midair. Then...「Poof!」The scroll exploded and vanished without a trace.

As the scroll disappeared, a bright light fell down upon the King

Manticore, enshrouding it. Then, all of a sudden, the gigantic beast began to shrink until it was reduced to the size of a small sheep. Realizing that the situation had changed, the King Manticore attempted to halt its charge, but the sudden change in body mass, coupled with the momentum that it had built up from its earlier charge, made it difficult. It placed its newly acquired hooves firmly on the ground and awkwardly slid forward until... 「Poof!」The King Manticore transformed, regaining its original appearance just two fleeting seconds after becoming a sheep.

The Sheep Transformation magic inside the scroll could transform ordinary monsters into sheep for ten seconds. During this time, if the player were to attack the transformed monster, then the spell would be cancelled prematurely. However, since the King Manticore had a high resistance against transformation magic, the spell's effects would last for no more than two seconds.

By the time the King Manticore had returned to its original form, its charging speed had been drastically reduced.

And Nie Yan didn't plan on giving it the opportunity to build its momentum back up either as he pulled out another scroll.

Web Scroll!

Suddenly, a gigantic cobweb appeared out of nowhere and fell on top of the King Manticore, trapping it.

The massive beast roared angrily as it thrashed about underneath the web. Though the web was quite strong, the King Manticore

was even stronger, and it broke free just a moment later.

Though the web didn't last long, it had still done its job by trapping the King Manticore, if even for a moment. Although it hadn't received any injuries, its previous speed had vanished without a trace.

Nie Yan's two scrolls had neutralized the most crucial, most ferocious, and most powerful strike from the King Manticore and, in doing so, had averted the imminent catastrophe that was about to befall the team.

At this point, the King Manticore had reached Violent Waves, who had been waiting to engage it with his shield raised. He opted to get the first strike in by fiercely bashing the beast with his shield. Immediately after, two spells, Repel Evil and Radiant Barrier, were cast on him by a Paladin and a Priest respectively.

Taunt!

Violent Waves quickly used the skill to draw the King Manticore's aggro onto himself.

Enraged by the taunts of the pest, the King Manticore roared as it raised its giant paws and swiped at him twice.

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After seeing the damage values float above their teammate's head, the other team members suddenly realized that the King Manticore on Specialist wasn't as terrifying as they had imagined. After all, the first time they encountered the King Manticore on Easy, Violent Waves had been sent to an early grave with just its first strike. Of course, this was due to many reasons. The first being that they had allowed the King Manticore to build up enough momentum in its charge, thereby significantly increasing the destructive force of its attack. Under such circumstances, a critical strike was very likely to occur as well. The second reason was because they had never cast Repel Evil while fighting the King Manticore, a spell which was extremely effective at restraining its killing power. The third reason was because the equipment Violent Waves wore at that time wasn't nearly as good as his current gear. The fourth and final reason was that most of the team members were around Level 3, so they didn't have Radiant Barrier which could absorb some of the damage.

Yet, right now, Violent Waves was able to endure the King Manticore's attacks without much difficulty even though it was a Lord-class monster. Thanks to the constant healing of the Priests, his situation was stable, at least for the moment.

At this very moment, Sleepy Fox had an epiphany. It was only now that he realized why Nie Yan had used the Sheep Transformation Scroll and the Web Scroll earlier. The actions which seemed silly and pointless actually had an underlying meaning. It was all for the sake of dispelling the team's fears which had been left behind from their previous encounters. Only, Nie Yan never said it outright.

Perhaps the Lord-class King Manticore really isn't as terrifying as we imagined, Sleepy Fox thought as he stared at Nie Yan's back. If they had a Thief in their team as capable as Nie Yan, then any dungeon would become easy.

Spells arced through the air and battered the King Manticore's body as they lit up the sky like a brilliant display of fireworks.

Meanwhile, Nie Yan circled behind the King Manticore and unleashed a flurry of attacks, each hit dealing at least seventy to eighty damage. Out of all the frontliners currently fighting alongside him, not a single one was able to match his damage. Those Fighters, Berserkers, and Paladins would only deal forty to fifty damage at most.

It didn't come as much of a surprise to him though. After all, not only were his equipment and weapons decent, but his stats were also greatly bolstered thanks to the Chapter of Courage. Not to mention, Thieves already possessed innately high attack speed. This, when paired with the fact that he also gained an additional thirty percent attack when striking an enemy from behind, was probably why he had the highest damage output among all the frontliners. It was even higher than some of the Mages in the rear.

As it suffered the team's fierce assault, the King Manticore's health gradually fell lower and lower.

80%... 70%... 60%...

Due to his ridiculous damage, the King Manticore suddenly

showed signs of aggroing onto him, so Nie Yan immediately stopped his attacks and retreated.

Demoralizing Shout!

MISS!

The King Manticore had the potential to ignore a Fighter's Demoralizing Shout. And of course, exactly at this moment, it had ignored Violent Waves' Demoralizing Shout.

Violent Waves cried out in alarm. If he couldn't keep its aggro, the consequences would be absolutely disastrous.

Before Violent Waves could get in another attack to pull back its aggro, the King Manticore abruptly switched targets and knocked the nearby Warrior and Thief. It raised its sharp claws and swiped down with a trail light following behind the attack. A Thief and Berserker were instantly killed by the attack and sent to the graveyard. At the same time, it attacked another Fighter, who, after receiving the attack, was only left with a sliver of health as he hurriedly retreated.

Violent Waves finally intervened and struck the King Manticore with Assault followed by Heroic Strike.

Heroic Strike was the most common offensive skill used by Fighters. Its damage was average, but it also had the effect of generating additional aggro.

Despite being hit by Violent Waves' Heroic Strike, the King Manticore still seemed unwilling to pay attention to this hard-to-chew bone of a player and began pursuing Nie Yan instead.

Out of all the bugs it had to deal with, Nie Yan's attacks were the most painful, and he also dealt the highest damage. So once the King Manticore saw Nie Yan was nearby, it immediately pounced toward him.

In response to the King Manticore charging toward him, Nie Yan retrieved a pouch of Flash Powder and lobbed it at the King Manticore.「Poof!」The glittering white powder scattered in the air and released a radiance so intense it almost burned and blinded the King Manticore's eyes. After being struck the by the Flash Powder, the King Manticore thrashed about on the ground.

Nie Yan seized this brief opening and quickly retreated several steps. Then, he took out a Web Scroll and activated it, trapping the King Manticore long enough for Violent Waves to arrive, who struck it several times with his shield and then subsequently used Taunt.

Throughout this string of events, the Mages in the team had adjusted their positions, but even then, they never stopped firing spells. Magic constantly bombarded the King Manticore without end.

Similar to how Sheep Transformation and Web's effects were reduced by its magic resistance, the King Manticore was merely

affected for a short while. When it regained its vision, its attention was once again on the closest enemy to it, Violent Waves.

Nie Yan response to such an unforeseen event could be considered satisfactory.